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FERVENT PRAYER.

REV. ASHTON OXENDEN.



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FERVENT PRAYER.

BY THE

REV. ASHTON OXENDEN,

AUTHOR OF "THE PASTORAL OFFICE," "THE PATHWAY
OF SAFETY," &c.

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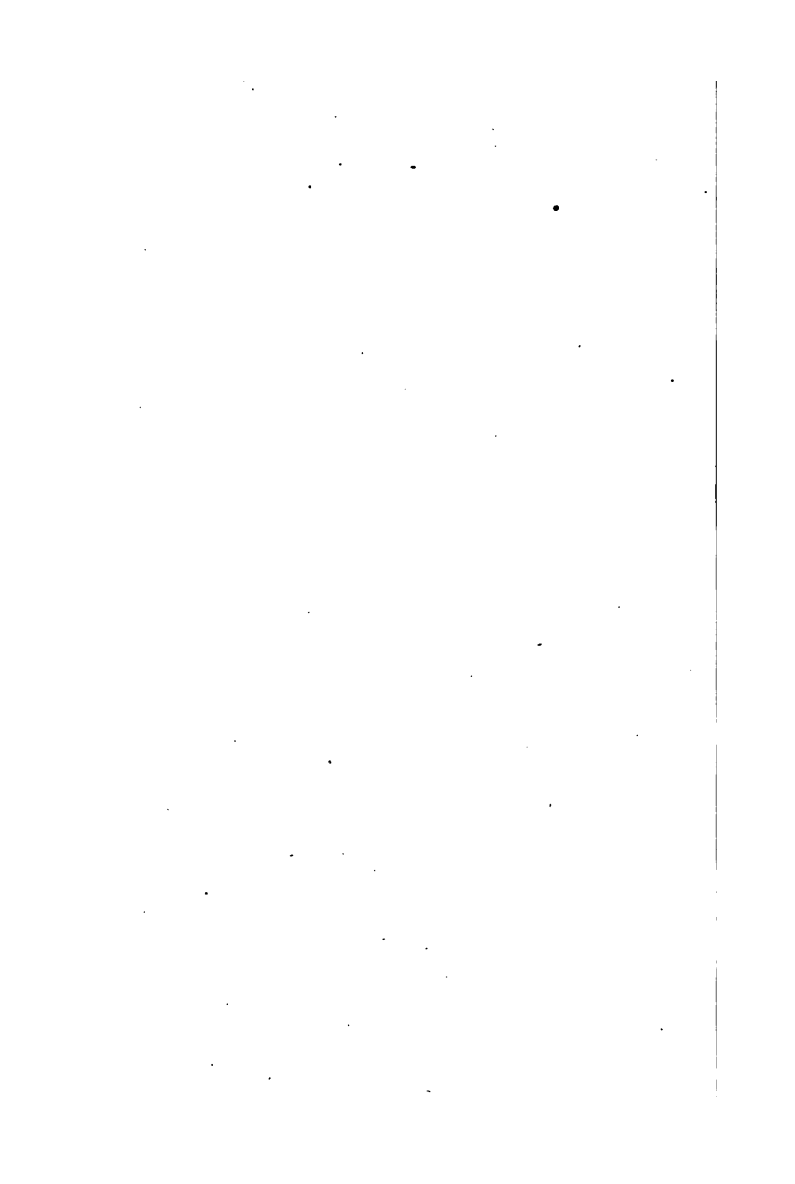
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FERVENT PRAYER.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

THERE is hardly a person in this Christian country who does not think that Prayer is necessary. Every one makes use of it in some way or other. Even the most ignorant, and careless, and hard-hearted, offer up some kind of Prayer. It is a rare thing for a man or woman to live *altogether* without prayer; deliberately to say, “ I will do without it.”

And yet how few *really* pray ! Many

3 B

people say over their prayers regularly, and the prayers they use may perhaps be very good ; and yet, for all this, they never *pray*. They say certain words upon their knees. These they have been taught from their childhood. Day after day they repeat them, as a matter of form. But there may be no *heart-work* all the while—no pouring out of the soul before God.

Do I, who am now sitting down to read this book, ever pray ? Now, in order to answer this important question, it is very desirable that we should clearly understand WHAT PRAYER IS.

It is not going through a certain exercise—repeating before God a mere string of words—drawing near to Him with our lips, whilst our hearts are far from Him. No, though numberless words may be

uttered, there is no Prayer in this. Such sounds are empty, and worthless ; they never reach heaven.

Many a person gets up in the morning, dresses himself, kneels down, and utters a few hurried sentences. And having thus *said his prayers*, he goes forth to his daily occupation. During the twelve or fourteen hours which follow, he perhaps never once breathes a single petition to God. Nay, he almost forgets that there is One above, “ in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being ”—One, “ in whose hands his breath is.” He thinks much of the little things of earth, with which he has to do, but seldom of Him, to whom he is indebted for every blessing he enjoys, and for every mercy which he receives. And then, at night, the same heartless,

unmeaning exercise is gone through before he lies down to sleep. Can we call *this* Prayer? Surely we cannot.

Prayer is the heart speaking to God—the telling all our wants to Him who is able to relieve them—the pouring out our complaints into His gracious ear. It is the poor, weak child going to his heavenly Father, and laying all his necessities before Him. It is the voice of one crying in his deep need to Him, who alone can help and save.

I dare say there have been occasions, when you have gone and *asked* a favour of some one greater than yourself, have you not? Or can you not remember the time when you felt unhappy, because you had wronged one of your fellow-creatures : and this led you to *entreat* him to forgive you ? Or again,

some day when you have been sitting in your house, you have heard *a knock* at the door. And when you have gone to it you have found some poor distressed creature standing there, who immediately began to *beg* you to give him something to relieve his hunger, or to cover his nakedness.

Now, in all these cases there was prayer—real “fervent prayer.” But then these were *prayers to men*. They will however just serve to show what it is to *pray to God*. It is to *ask* Him for something ; to *entreat* Him ; to *knock* at the door of mercy ; to come to Him full of wants, and desiring to have those wants supplied.

But, if you would have your prayers accepted, they must be like arrows shot *from the heart*, for none else ever reach

the throne of God. , It is *the heart* that prays, not the knees, nor the hands, nor the lips. Have you never seen a dumb man, with his back to the wall; asking alms? His tongue can utter no words, and yet he begs as earnestly with his imploring countenance and with his out-stretched hand, as one that had a voice to tell his complaints. Oh that we felt the same real want, and the same deep earnestness, in offering up our petitions to God!

Now then put the question to yourself again, *Do I ever pray?* Do I ever go to God, as one asking some great favour, which I feel that He only can grant me? Do I draw near to Him as a penitent, as one who has sinned, imploring His forgiveness? Do I feel like a poor needy beggar, who has

nothing to give, and 'all to receive? God does indeed love to hearken to us, when we come to Him with humble hearts? "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit."

Think often of that lowly Publican in the parable. And be assured that the contrite, penitent, humble heart is a sacrifice God will not despise.

Indeed, an unhumbled heart cannot delight in Prayer. A proud man may love to preach, for he is flattered by the attention of his hearers. A proud man may take pleasure in giving alms, for he thereby gains the praise of his fellow-men. But a proud man cannot love Prayer. For in prayer man is

nothing; God is all. In prayer we are not givers, but receivers—not full, but empty—not as those who can do great things, but as those that can do nothing but as God enables them.

Dear Reader, I want you to look closely into your own heart, to see how it has hitherto been with you. Think of the prayers you offered up this very morning, and are going to offer up to-night. What are they? Perhaps nothing more than so many words correctly uttered by the tongue, but the heart has no part in them.

Now, if conscience whispers to you that there has been something wrong in your prayers—nay, that hitherto perhaps they have been no prayers at all—it is well to have made the dis-

covery. Better is it to know that our prayers are worthless, than to go on deceiving ourselves, and supposing that all is right with God.

But I earnestly desire something further—namely, that you may become from this time *a really praying person*. Until we begin to draw near to God in earnest, there can be no spiritual life in us. How is it with the body? If it does not breathe, we are sure that it cannot be alive. And so too is it with the soul. When it does not pray we know that it is dead; for prayer is its very breath.

But although I have tried to speak plainly, there may be some who still do not understand what it is to pray. And no wonder; for until a person's

soul is quickened by the Spirit of God, he cannot pray himself, nor can he understand what prayer is.

We read in the Acts of the Apostles of Saul being converted. Just after his conversion it is said of him, "Behold he prayeth." What! had he never prayed till that moment? Whilst he was a blind Pharisee, had he not prayed, standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets? Yes, he had probably repeated many prayers. I dare say he said them regularly; but never, till his heart was opened by God's grace, did he pray in earnest. Then he saw and felt how great his wants were—what pardon he needed for his many sins—what strength to enable him to serve his new Master. So he came to God, as to one who

could do all for him ; and we know that he did not come in vain.

Be assured that God's people are always *a praying people*. This is one of the most certain marks by which His children may be known. One who has learnt to pray as he ought has found out the secret of a godly life. We may grow rich without prayer. We may live long without prayer. We may become learned without prayer. We may get through the world without prayer. But never, never, shall we reach heaven without it. It is prayer that knocks at the gate of mercy, and that calls down showers of blessings from above. It is by prayer that we come to Christ, and find salvation for our souls.

It has been said that the Christian

is only a stranger here on earth; but that there is a chain which binds him to heaven. The upper links of that chain are unseen, far above the clouds : but the lower ones are before us—faith, and love, and *prayer*.

But if you still ask *What is prayer ?* I cannot answer you better than in the beautiful words of a Christian poet, who himself knew well its true nature and value.

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered, or unexpressed ;
The motion of a hidden fire,
That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech,
That infant lips can try ;
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.

Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice
Returning from his ways ;
While angels in their songs rejoice,
And say, " Behold he prays !"

O Thou, by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way :
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod ;
Lord, teach us how to pray.

CHAPTER II.

GOD THE HEARER OF PRAYER.

You may possibly have read "The Life of the Rev. John Newton." He was a very devoted minister of the Church of England. After his death his private memorandum book was found; and in this book there were many things which show that he was a man of "fervent prayer." On one occasion, early in his history, we find that he had noted down the following remarks about himself—"About this time I began to know that *there is a 'od who hears and answers prayer.*"

Now, I ask, has this time ever come to *you*? Have you learnt to feel the value of prayer: and are you persuaded that your heavenly Father does indeed hear and answer the cry of His children who call upon Him?

The holy Psalmist David knew from his own happy experience that this was God's character—that He was a *prayer-hearing God*. We find him thus addressing God in Psalm lxx., "O thou that *hearest* prayer." And again and again does he use such expressions as this, "The Lord *will hear*, when I call upon Him."

It is a great matter to have this truth firmly fixed in our minds; for the very feeling that God hears us will make us pray earnestly. Have we not sometimes gone *doubtingly* to our heavenly

Father? And the consequence has been that our prayers were cold, and poor, and lifeless. But when we have come to Him with the full persuasion that His ears are open, and His heart inclined towards us, then with what humble boldness have we cried to Him! "This (says the Apostle John) is *the confidence* that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, *He heareth us.*"

Nothing gives us such a blessed assurance in prayer, as the feeling that we are drawing near to One who is our *Father*, and that if we approach Him in the name of Christ we are always welcome. Have you never observed the knock of an intruder at your door? He comes with a low, timid, hesitating rap, which seems to say, "I have no

claim on the kindness of this house ; I may be told I come too often ; I may be sent away, as a troublesome petitioner." But how different is the bold knock of a child, on his return from school, as he rushes joyously into his father's presence, throws his arms about his neck, and reminds him of some promised favour.* "Seeing, then, that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God . . . : let us come *boldly* to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need."

But does God really hear *me*, when I kneel down and pray to Him? I know that He is the Almighty Governor of the whole world. He sits upon

* See Guthrie on Ezekiel, p. 439.

His throne, ordering everything in heaven and earth. He looks down on the kingdoms of this world, and makes them great, or brings them low, according to His own will. He refreshes the earth with rain, or withholds the fruitful showers, as He sees best. But is it likely that so great a Being should care about *my* little wants, and concern Himself about *my* trifling affairs? He may care about kings and nobles, He may take an interest in nations and countries, but surely *my* concerns, the wants and happiness of one so insignificant as I am, must be beneath His notice.

This may well be a wonder to many of us, because we cannot help judging of God as we do of men. A man often will not take the trouble to busy him-

self about the little affairs of others. But it is not so with God. The very poorest and humblest among us has not a single want, that is beneath His notice. Our Lord Himself assures us that not even a worthless sparrow falls to the ground without our heavenly Father's knowledge and permission. And are not we, each one of us, of more value in His sight than many sparrows?

Then there is another great difference between man and God. Man can only be in one place at a time, and can only listen to one petitioner. But God is everywhere, and can attend to all at once. While He was listening to Peter at Joppa, the prayer of Cornelius was heard at Cæsarea. He can attend to our united cries, when we are met in

His house; and at the very same moment He can hearken to the feeble voice of some dying Christian on his bed of suffering.

Yes, thank God, He can, and will, hear us. It is indeed a most sweet and comforting truth, that the great God is willing to stoop down, and give an ear to the cry of the poorest beggar that walks the earth, or of the youngest child who kneels before Him. “Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; but *to this man will I look*, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”

But sometimes *this* thought comes across us—Does not God know all things *before we ask Him*? What then is the use of prayer? Certainly God

is acquainted with all our wants long before we tell Him of them. But still He will be asked before He gives. He stands, as it were, with His arms full of blessings; but He only bestows them in answer to prayer. He seems to say to His people, "I have had pity upon sinners; I have provided pardon for the guilty; grace, and holiness, and peace, and joy for those who will accept them. All these blood-bought happy blessings shall be yours, freely yours; and yet not yours, unless they are sought for in prayer. I will be *enquired of* by the house of Israel, to do it for them,"—that is, I will have my children ask me; and then I will bestow my gifts upon them; for "he that *asketh* receiveth, and he that *seeketh* findeth, and to him that *knocketh* it shall be opened."

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Now, why does God require this of us? Why does He make us ask, before He is willing to grant? It is that we may feel our dependence upon Him for all our gifts. It is that we may humble ourselves before His throne, and may show our earnestness and faith in coming to Him.

And what an unspeakable comfort it is, that God *does know* our wants before we tell Him of them! Is He acquainted with all our ways? Is He aware of our exact condition? Is every circumstance of our life, and every want, open to Him? Can He read in an instant the secret desires and feelings of our hearts? Then He is the very one, into whose ear we may well pour our complaints—the very one, who can best understand our peculiar

case. Oh, this should indeed encourage us to come thankfully to the throne of grace, and draw near to our heavenly Friend.

Then again, what a comforting thought it is that God is always on His throne, and that throne is *a throne of grace!* He is ever ready to receive those who come to Him in the Saviour's name. There is not a single want which springs up within us, not a sorrow that makes our hearts ache, not a difficulty that troubles us, but His ear is open to listen to it, and He only waits to give us the relief we desire. Oh that we may learn the happy secret of putting all our concerns into His hands, and then leaving them with Him. When Hezekiah received

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a letter from Sennacherib which greatly troubled him, what did he do? He went with the letter in his hand into the temple, and "spread it before the Lord." And this is just what we should be ever doing, and especially when we have any trouble or difficulty which perplexes us. Whatever it be, we should at once carry it to the Lord, and make it a subject of prayer to Him.

Hast thou within a Care so deep
It chases from thine eyelids sleep?
To thy Redeemer take that care,
And change anxiety to prayer.

Hast thou a Hope, with which thy heart
Would almost feel it death to part?
Entreat thy God that hope to crown,
Or give thee strength to lay it down.

Hast thou a Friend, whose image dear
May prove an idol worshipped here ?
Implore the Lord that nought may be
A shadow between heaven and thee.

Whate'er the care that breaks thy rest,
Whate'er the wish that swells thy breast,
Spread before God that wish, that care,
And change anxiety to prayer.

And are there not times, when we feel utterly unable to speak to God as we could wish ? Our heart perhaps is full of grief, or full of thankfulness, and we find it difficult to express ourselves. Then the thought that God knows all—this does indeed encourage us to put ourselves in His presence.

Learn then, my dear friend, to look upon God as a *prayer-hearing God*. He knows your case, and is quite willing to give you all that is for your truest

good. He is not only your Creator, but your loving *Father*, who calls you to Him, and delights to relieve your wants. Yes, believe that God is your *God*, and therefore *able* to help you: He is your *Father* and *Friend*, and therefore *willing* to hear you.

Think of this the next time you kneel down to pray. Remember it is your gracious *Father* you are going to speak to, who concerns himself about the daily and hourly necessities of His children. Approach Him with affectionate boldness. Speak to Him with confidence. Ask, as if you felt that you were not asking in vain. Tell Him of all your wants, of all your difficulties, and of all your troubles. None are too great for Him; none are too small. He has an attentive ear for all.

“ If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him.”

CHAPTER III.

HOW TO PRAY RIGHTLY.

WE have seen what Prayer is ; that it is not merely saying over certain words, or kneeling down for a certain length of time. That would be only *the outward form of prayer*—the shell without the kernel. But when a person really *prays* he speaks to God, and believes that God will hear him. He pours out his heart before the Lord. He tells Him of all his sins, of all his troubles, and of all his wants and weaknesses ; and he entreats God to

grant His pardon, and grace, and strength, and guidance.

But I will now offer you some directions, which may help you in your prayers. I will try and show you *how to pray rightly*.

1. Always *kneel down* when you pray. I wish it was unnecessary to give this direction. But there are some, I fear, who seldom or never bend the knee either in God's house or in their own closets. And yet even when we go before an earthly sovereign to present a petition, do we not always kneel to shew our respect? Shall we then shew *less* reverence in approaching the King of kings?

If I were to follow you to your bedside, I hope I should find you "meekly

kneeling on your knees" before God. But I am afraid it is not so with all. The posture of some is anything but reverent. They fall down upon their knees perhaps, but it is in a careless, idle manner, which shews but too plainly the feeling of the heart within. And there are some too, who are in the habit of saying their prayers *in bed*. Half asleep and half awake, they just repeat a prayer, as if the mere words would bring a blessing, and as if anything was good enough for God.

Leave off at once so bad a habit; for such devotions are little better than no devotions at all. Take my advice—whether you are worshipping God in public or in private, let it be always *upon your knees*. It is true, kneeling is not everything, but it is a great help

to us in prayer, and it reminds us that we are unworthy sinners, and that we have need to humble ourselves before a holy God.

Christian, kneel, for God is near ;
Bend in love, in holy fear.
Kneel before Him now in prayer ;
Thank Him for His constant care.

Praise Him for the mercies shed,
Every moment on thy head ;
Ask for light to know His will ;
Ask for love thy heart to fill ;

Ask for faith to bear thee on
Through the might of Christ His Son ;
Ask in awe, in holy fear ;
Christian, kneel, for God is near.

2. Try to realise the presence of God.

Before you pray, say to yourself, I am now going to speak to God Himself. I am going to draw near to His throne. I, a poor sinful creature, am going to approach the high and holy One.

This will help you to put aside all worldly and sinful thoughts, and to raise your heart heavenwards. It is sad to think how often we rush into God's presence, with our hearts utterly unprepared for the solemn work in which we are about to engage. And when this is the case, is it any wonder that our prayers bring no comfort to ourselves, and no answer from above? The Lord is offended, instead of being pleased, with such devotions as these.

Make an effort then—and without an effort it cannot be done—make an effort to raise your mind upwards, and

remember that you are going to address God Himself.

3. Guard against *wandering thoughts*. Satan hates to see us praying. He well knows that prayer is our strongest weapon, and that every petition we offer brings down fresh strength to enable us to resist him. If he can then, he will draw us away *from prayer* altogether; and if he fails in this, then he will use every means to draw us away *in prayer*. He will endeavour to dart in some worldly or wicked thoughts, in order to interrupt us. And too often he succeeds. If we are not very much on our guard—if our hearts are not closed and barred by watchfulness—he will break in, and disturb us in our holiest moments.

My dear Christian brother or sister,

have you not many a time found this to be the case? I know you have, and it has sorely grieved you. You kneel down, and really wish to pray. But in a moment perhaps your thoughts are far away; they are running after some earthly object; and it is hard, very hard, to bring them back. And sometimes, alas, even the most trifling things—things which you are ashamed of—come rushing in, and stealing away your heart from God. This has distressed you, and you have got up from your knees with an aching heart, and you have felt that the time, which might have been so blest, has been worse than wasted.

If you wish to avoid such a temptation as this, and to keep your hearts
ed in the season of devotion, be as-

sured, much care and pains are needed. It is hard indeed to draw off the miser's heart from his gold, but how easy a matter to draw away our thoughts from God, even when we are kneeling before Him! No wonder then that our Lord bids His disciples "*watch,*" as well as "*pray,*" and that St. Peter exhorts us to "*be sober, and watch unto prayer.*"

4. See that your *heart be right with God*. Is the drunkard heard, or the swearer, when he comes home at night and prays? Is the hard, unforgiving man heard, who allows the remains of malice, and illwill, and revenge, still to rankle in his breast? When he asks pardon, is *his* prayer accepted? The man who knows what is right, who at times has strong religious feelings, and

can talk well about the things of God ; but who gives way to some secret, hidden sin, some evil lust for instance, or some unholy temper ; do *his* prayers reach the ear of God ? No, such prayers will never be accepted, until he who offers them desires earnestly and heartily to forsake his sin, whatever it be.

We often pray, "Lead us not into temptation." But if all the while we determine to rush into it, can we expect God to hear us ? Or suppose a person feels that he gets harm by going to a particular place, or indulging in anything which gives him special pleasure, is it not mockery to ask God to shield and protect him, when he thus lays himself open to the attacks of Satan ?

Let David answer the question, "If I regard in my heart, the Lord will not hear me ;" or Solomon, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." It is sad when any one trifles with God in a matter so solemn. It is sad thus to open, as it were, the door of mercy by our prayers, and then to close it against ourselves by our sin.

Oh, let us be honest with God, and not attempt to deceive Him. It is true He is willing to hear the prayer of the vilest sinner, who really hates his sin, and flies to Him for mercy. But it is an insult to go to Him, whilst sin is loved and cherished in the heart. "Holiness becometh God's house" and God's worshippers. "I will (says the Apostle) that men pray everywhere, lifting up *holy* hands." And another Apostle tells us

that the great secret of obtaining our petitions is to *walk obediently* with God; "Whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

5. Pray *in faith*. Why are our prayers oftentimes so poor, and cold, and languid? It is because we do not really believe that the Lord is *able* to give us, and also *willing* to give us, what we ask for. Therefore we approach the throne with wavering, doubting, undecided hearts.

Now, this dishonours God. It is very displeasing to Him. Would it not displease a fellow-creature, if we were to go and ask him for something, and at the same time were to tell him that

we mistrusted him? And remember, God reads our hearts.

Here then is a reason why we so often get up from our knees so little refreshed and comforted. What! shall we doubt God, when He so graciously promises to receive us? How abundant are the promises to *believing* prayer! Does not our Lord Himself give us plenteous encouragement, when He says, "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive;" and again, "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, *believe* that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

Every time you drop a letter into the letter-box, you do it *in faith*. You believe that the letter which contains your words will be carried to its destination, and that in due time the reply will come.

You cannot *see* the postman put it into his bag and carry it off. You cannot follow it, as it travels mile after mile, from one part of the country to the other. But yet you trust, and believe, and expect that all will be well, and that your writing will not be in vain.

Exercise the same faith in higher things. Believe that the words uttered in your private chamber will mount up to the throne of God, and bring down blessings from above.

God has an abundant supply. Only ask in faith, and that supply is open to you. Prayer is the golden Key which unlocks the heavenly treasure; and no one can use that key too often. It is the Pitcher which we let down into the well which is never dry. Go again

and again, and be assured you will never come away empty. God loves to "fill the hungry with good things," whilst "the rich," and those who fancy they have need of nothing, "are sent empty away."

6. Ask *earnestly*. Our prayers must be fervent; they should come from a burning, glowing soul. The whole inner man should go up in secret cries. Surely if we feel our wants deeply, we cannot express them coldly. If the fire really burns within us, there will be heat. Need I tell you that prayers without earnestness are like a bird without wings. The eagle soars away towards heaven, but these never leave the ground.

Did you ever go into a court of justice, and hear a Prisoner tried for his

life? When he is found guilty and condemned to death, have you not heard him cry for mercy? Did you not notice his pale and anxious face, which so plainly told you of the bitter agony of his mind? Ah, his was an earnest cry; for he dreaded his punishment, and longed for pardon.

Again, was not the Prodigal Son in earnest, when he ran to his father, and said, "Father, I have sinned?" Was not drowning Peter in earnest, when he cried, "Lord, save me?" Was not the Publican's a fervent prayer, "God be merciful to me, a sinner?"

Do you draw near to God with such prayer as this? I do not ask if you pray thus at *all* times, but do you *ever* offer up such earnest, hearty supplications to God? Depend upon it, this is the

prayer which prevails. It is the bow fully bent that speeds the arrow, and sends it straight home to the mark. It is when the wrestler puts forth his whole strength into the struggle, that he wins the day. The cry that will take no denial is that which pierces to the throne of heaven.

Oh then, be earnest with God ; for your wants are many, your need is great, and His delight is to give. And it is to the urgent, pressing petitioner that He loves to hearken. From such an one the Lord will never turn away.

7. Ask all *in the name of Christ*. And why not in our own name ? It is because we have sinned, and our sins have separated us from God. But it is not a hopeless separation. There is a way by which we may draw near to

Him. Christ says, "I am the way . . . no man cometh unto the Father but *by me*." There is this way, and no other, by which we may come to God. And this is the reason why, in all our Church prayers especially, we use some such words as these—"Through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ;" or, "For Jesus Christ's sake;" or "For the honour of our Mediator and Advocate Jesus Christ."

What a blessing it is that we, who are so unworthy to speak to God, have One who allows us to use His name, and who Himself speaks to His heavenly Father for us!

But let us not merely go through the form of mentioning Christ our Saviour's name. Let us earnestly plead His merits; and let us believe His

gracious promise, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in my name*, He will give it you."

I might give you many more directions; but it is hoped that these few will be useful to you. Try to act upon them. It may be well to examine yourself on each of these heads, and see what is your weak point, and where you fail. The word of God tells us that we "ask and receive not, *because we ask amiss.*"

It is a blessed thing if God has taught you that you have naturally no power to pray. There was a time perhaps, when you could *say prayers* fluently enough; but now at times you find yourself scarcely able to *pray* at all. You now realise what

it is to be in the presence of God. You feel that it is a very solemn thing to speak to Him. You cannot do it, until the spirit looses your tongue, and teaches you to cry "Abba, Father."

Among other petitions then do not forget to ask for *the power to pray*. And may the Lord give you "the spirit of grace and of supplications!" May He teach you how to ask! And may the act of prayer be one of real comfort and joy to your soul!

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN AND WHERE TO PRAY.

PRAYER can never be out of time, or out of place. St. Paul says to Timothy, "I will that men pray *everywhere*." And our Lord, in one of His parables, declares that "men ought *always* to pray, and not to faint." And again, we are told to "pray *without ceasing*."

There is no moment in our lives, when we have not need of prayer; and there is no corner of the earth, where we may not bend the knee in humble supplication. God is everywhere, and

His ear is ever open to the cry of His children.

Where'er they seek Thee, thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground.

Look at that humble Christian, who goes up into his garret, that he may get away for a while from the world, and hold communion with his Friend above. Or look at that Young Servant of God—very young it may be—but not too young to love his Saviour—more thoughtful perhaps, and serious, than his companions. See him alone, in some quiet corner, speaking to his heavenly Father, and telling Him of all his little cares, and all his daily wants. Or follow that Labouring man, as he lifts up his heart to God by the wayside, or in the harvest field. Or go to

that sick chamber, where lies perhaps some poor Sufferer, to whose soul sickness has proved a blessing. If you could look deep into his heart, you would see that although once so hard, and so steeled against the truth, it is now humbled under a sense of conscious guilt, and is yearning for that forgiving mercy which the Saviour loves to bestow.

Oh, who shall say that those prayers are not heard? Who shall say that arrows shot from such hearts do not reach the heavenly goal?

Again, if you had gone into the city of Damascus, years ago, when a great persecution was raging against the Christians, you might have seen, in one of the bye streets, a man upon his knees—a day or two before denying

Christ, and "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" against His people; but now, "Behold, he prayeth!" Or, about eighteen years later, if you had happened to pass under the dreary walls of a Macedonian town, you would have heard, amidst the clank of chains, the sweet sounds of prayer and praise streaming forth from the lips of the same Christian Prisoner.

And did not those prayers find acceptance? Did they not prevail with Him, whose throne is a throne of grace? Yes, God can and does hearken to such prayers, *from whatsoever spot they come*. It has been well said, that "a praying heart never lacks a praying place."

If our hearts are touched by the Spirit of God—if we have a deep con-

viction of our many wants—then our feeling is sure to find vent in prayer, wherever we are, and at all times during the day. We shall feel alone with God in the busy crowd. We shall converse with Him, as we pass along the streets of the peopled city. We shall enjoy His presence in the fields, by the roadside, and whilst we are engaged in our daily toil. We shall speak to Him in the wakeful hours of the night. This kind of prayer—this breathing of the heart—need not hinder us in our other employments. If we are on a journey, our souls may be soaring upwards, whilst our feet are all the time carrying us on our way. Or, if we are in the field at work, the plough need not stand still for this: a word with our heavenly Father need not interrupt our work.

Oh, well is it when any one's heart is so strung by the grace of God, that it is always in tune, and prayer is never unwelcome.

I would recommend you, dear Christian reader, to get into this praying frame—this *constant* habit of lifting up your heart to heaven. *Prayerful communion* with God is what I would especially commend to your soul; holding *converse* with Him at *all* times and in *all* places. Your words may be very few. Your prayers may be silent, and not expressed. Your heart, like Hannah's, may pray, though no words be heard. Let it be your aim, not only to come near to God at special times, but *to live near Him always*. Try to get into the way of seeking Him, not only at your regular seasons of worship, but in

your hours of business and of pleasure—of remembering Him, not only when you are on your knees, but through every hour of the day—of consulting Him, leaning upon Him, and putting your affairs, great and small, into His hands. This is “praying *without ceasing*.” Ah, it is a habit by no means easy to form; and it is one which requires much grace to enable us to keep it up.

But Times and Places for prayer are by no means to be despised.

First, as to *Places* for Prayer. Thank God, there is throughout this happy land a House in every village specially set apart as “the House of God.” There we may go up to worship Him, and there He is always to be found.

“ My house (He says) shall be called *the House of Prayer*.” And again He says, “ where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Here is a solemn place ; and if we enter it with solemn and devout feelings, God will meet us and bless us. David sighed after the Temple at Jerusalem : he always longed to be there. And to the true Christian the dearest spot upon earth will be his Father's House—that hallowed place, “ where prayer is wont to be made.”

We cannot however be always in God's House. But there is another place, where we may “ continually resort” for prayer—*our own Closet*. “ Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet,” says our Lord. This is the

place, where a devout Christian will often be found. He wishes to be sometimes alone with God, and to "pray to his Father which is in secret." And, oh, what blessings has he found in drawing near to God in private!

"If you can (says one), secure five minutes in the day *alone with your God*. But if you live in a crowd, get it in the quiet chamber of your own heart. A young sailor Boy was remarked for his serenity and presence of mind in his first battle. 'How was it, my boy (the mate asked), that you were ready for everything, and yet as quiet as if by your mother's fireside?' 'Because I was *alone with my God* for an hour before the fight began.'"

Are you a man of business? You have need every now and then to get a

sight of your heavenly Father, or this world will soon obtain possession of your heart. Are you a care-worn mother? Are you full of thought and anxiety about your family? Go often into your secret chamber, and tell out your troubles to Him who knows them all, and can sustain you under them. Are you a working man—toiling for your very life? Look up to your heavenly Friend: He can make your labour sweet. Are you young and healthy, in the prime of your early days? Get aside from your young companions now and then: go up to your bedroom, and acknowledge all your follies and sins, and ask Jesus to be with and to bless you.

In short, if you wish to be in earnest about your soul, you will feel the com-

fort of resorting to God's House, and also the preciousness of closet prayer.

Then, as to *Times* of prayer. I have said that we should pray *always*, that we should ever be lifting our hearts upwards. But still we should have our *stated seasons* for special devotion. It is a great help to have regular fixed hours for prayer.

No person, even the busiest, should rise from his bed *in the morning* without thanking God for the mercies of the past night, and asking for His protection and blessing during the coming day. So too *at night*, I hope that none of us would think of laying ourselves down to rest, without solemnly putting ourselves under God's care, and asking

Him to pardon the many sins of the past day.

But stated prayer twice a day will not be enough for one whose soul has real life in it. He will feel a wish to find some time in the *middle of the day*, when he may come into God's presence. It may be but for a few minutes; but these minutes are very precious.

Daniel felt the comfort of this; for we find it was his custom to "go into his house, and kneel upon his knees *three times a day*, and pray, and give thanks, before his God." Oh, this it was that kept his soul in peace, and made him fearless in the midst of danger. Such too was David's custom. He had plenty to occupy his time; but he too found it good to come three times a day before his God. "*Evening, and morning, and*

at noon will I pray and cry aloud ; and He shall hear my voice !”

My dear friend, may the Lord kindle in your heart a desire to be *much in prayer* ! May you feel it to be, not a task, but your sweetest occupation ! May your place in God's house be never vacant without a cause ; and may the walls of your chamber bear witness that you often wrestle with God in prayer, and will not “let Him go except He bless you !”

CHAPTER V.

SOME COMMON MISTAKES ABOUT PRAYER.

How often we misunderstand the plainest things connected with God's truth! And this sometimes greatly hinders us in our Christian course. Our minds are naturally so clouded and darkened, and even when grace lights them up we see so dimly, that the wisest of us fall into mistakes. I will mention some of those which are connected with Prayer.

FIRST MISTAKE.

Some seem to suppose that, in order

to pray rightly, *Learning is necessary*. Thus we hear people sometimes complaining that *they cannot find words*. And this distresses them.

Now, dear reader, never let this thought disturb you. God has no respect to the fineness and fluency of our words. It is not Learning that we need, but the grace of the Holy Spirit. He will give you words, if only you will seek His aid. He will supply you with thoughts that breathe, and words that burn. If He is at work in your heart, and you are under His influence and teaching, then you will and must pray. Prayer is the breathing of a spiritual heart : it is the bursting forth of a new-born soul. If you feel your danger, and long to be saved, then I am very sure you will not stop long for *words*. Out

of the abundance of your heart your mouth will speak.

Think again of that Beggar, who stands at your door. Has *he* any difficulty in finding words? He can tell you that he is hungry, because he *feels* so. He can ask you for clothes to cover him, because his limbs are aching with cold. And do you dream of sending him away, because he has no fine words? Surely not. Then be encouraged in drawing near to God, who is a God of love. He will not send you empty away, because your words may be poor, and because your tongue can hardly utter all that your heart feels. Even the faintest whisper of a contrite soul, which sighs over its own dulness, is sure to find acceptance with the Lord.

Have you no words ? Oh think again.
Words flow apace, when we complain,
And fill our fellow-creature's ear
With the sad tale of all our care.

Were half the breath thus vainly spent
To heaven in supplication sent,
Our cheerful song would oftener be—
“Hear what the Lord hath done for me.”

SECOND MISTAKE.

Many say that *they have no time for prayer*. Now, I can fancy some labouring man or woman reading this, and saying, “Well, I am sure, I have little or no spare time during the day. I work hard ; and if I can get a few minutes in the morning and evening, just to say a *hurried prayer* to my

Maker, it is all I can be expected to do."

Yes, it is true, you have but very little spare time. You are called from your bed to go to work very early in the morning; and then, when night comes, your limbs are often tired with toil. But still, is not prayer as needful for you as for the rich? There is a Hell, from which you must escape. There is a Heaven, for you to win. There are dangers and temptations all around you; and you need grace and strength to keep you from falling.

Try and *find* time. Try and *make* time for prayer; for without it you are lost. Your prayers need not be long; but let them be earnest and hearty.

I am sure, you will find that prayer sweetens all your labours, and makes

even your troubles light to bear. You have perhaps many hardships to undergo, and trials which nearly weigh you down. Take them all to God in prayer. Look at Psalm xxxiv. 4, 5; Psalm lv. 22; and 1 Pet. v. 7. There you see your remedy. And may the Lord bless those precious words to your soul!

THIRD MISTAKE.

Some complain that at times *they have no mind to pray*: and they think, when this is the case, they had better *leave it alone*. No, no; you must not do that. You are not in a prayerful frame perhaps—your heart is cold and earthbound—the wings of your faith are leaded, as it were, and you cannot

mount upwards. Then you have all the more need of prayer. Kneel down, and ask God to give you His Holy Spirit, to enable you to shake off the dulness which is upon you. *Try* to pray. Struggle against your unbelief. And in the very effort you will get spiritual strength, and find your soul quickened and warmed.

I am inclined to think that those prayers, which cost us most, and in which we feel the greatest difficulty, are often the most acceptable to God, and bring down the largest blessings. Besides, if we only pray when we have a mind for prayer—what is this but giving place to the devil, and humouring our own evil heart?

FOURTH MISTAKE.

Some seem to think that almost *any words* will do for a prayer to God, and that it matters little what we say.

I have known many who have used *the Belief*, and have fancied that it is a Prayer. This is a great mistake. In the Belief we merely declare what truths we hold as Christians. But we *ask* for nothing. We *confess* nothing. And therefore, you see, there is no prayer at all in it. It is true, we use the Belief in church ; because it is well for us, when we meet together, to declare in the presence of God what we profess to believe. But you never saw the clergyman or the people kneeling down, whilst repeating it. So in

future never look upon those words as a prayer. The Belief contains a sound form of words, which is most valuable ; but there is not *one petition* throughout the whole of it.

Some again offer up words, which have scarcely any meaning in them—words which they would be almost ashamed of speaking to a fellow-creature. They learnt them somewhere years ago ; and without thinking of their meaning they have gone on repeating them ever since.

Now, you may easily get your minister, or some religious friend, to give you a nice sensible prayer just suited to your wants.

FIFTH MISTAKE.

Some have doubted if it is right to pray for *worldly blessings*. But surely it is right, if we desire to have them, or not to have them, just as God wills. A poor man may ask for riches in this way, "Lord, make me rich, *if* thou seest it well for me." A sick man may pray, "Lord, raise me up from this bed, *if* such be thy will." Or, a person who is entering upon some business may say, "O God, prosper my undertaking, *if* it be for Thy glory, and for my good." This is praying with submission to the will of God; desiring that His glory and our eternal good may be accomplished.

In meek submission to thy will
Let every prayer arise ;
And teach us, Lord, 'tis goodness still
That grants it, or denies.

SIXTH MISTAKE.

"Is it necessary to *pray loudly*?" was a question once asked me by a poor, but godly, woman. A neighbour had tried to persuade her that it *was* necessary. But she could not feel it to be so. And she was right.

Our earnestness in prayer does not depend on the loudness with which we make our requests. We shall not be "heard for our much speaking." It is not *the vehemence of our cries*, which will awaken God's attention, but *the fervour of our hearts*.

The inward whisper of a believing soul will be heard in heaven. Look at that "sorrowful woman" mentioned in 1 Samuel i. There she stands by herself. No sound is heard. No words escape her lips. And yet she prays most earnestly; her prayer is heard on high. Or go into some sick chamber, where lies a dying Christian. All is still, for death is not far off. You stand by the bedside, and watch that suffering, but peaceful, countenance. No words come from those feeble lips; and yet you feel sure there is prayer going on within. The heart prays. And is not that prayer effectual? Is it not heard and answered in heaven? We know it is.

SEVENTH MISTAKE.

We are apt sometimes to think that we are *doing God a favour* by praying to Him. Many mistakes arise from this. For instance, I converse with a person, and ask him what his hopes of salvation are resting on. And how often this answer is given—"I have kept my church very regularly; I have always said my prayers too at home: *therefore* I hope to get to heaven."

What a dangerous mistake! If my reader knows anything of his own heart, he will feel how very poor and imperfect even his best prayers are. He will feel that even his most solemn devotions are stained with sin, and need God's forgiveness. Instead of

supposing that he can be doing God a favour by praying to Him, he will feel it is a great favour that he is *permitted* to pray. And instead of being inclined to boast that he has prayed so much, he will rather be disposed to acknowledge that even his best prayers have been mingled with sin.

Beware then of relying on your unworthy acts of prayer, or of putting prayer in the place of a Saviour. Trust not, my dear friend, in this or any other work of your own, but only in the perfect work of Christ's atonement. His blood was shed for guilty sinners; and in that blood alone we can find pardon and acceptance.

CHAPTER VI.

ANSWERS TO PRAYER.

Do we not often feel very cold in prayer? Have we not sometimes got up from our knees with the impression that we have gained nothing? God has seemed afar off from us. We asked; but it was as if we were speaking to one out of reach.

And why is this? We know well enough that God can *hear* us; but yet we do not feel so sure that He is willing to *grant* our requests. We do not expect our prayers to be *answered*.

And thus we displease God, and rob ourselves of much comfort. Surely we ought to take our petitions to the Lord, and then rest assured that, if we have asked for right things, we shall have them granted, just in that way which is best for us. We ought to pray, under the full assurance that He will say to us, "Go thy way; be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Now, it is clear from the word of God, that He *does* answer prayer. In Ps. xci. He says, "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him." In Isa. lxxv. we find this gracious promise, "And it shall come to pass that, before they call, I will answer." Our Lord too gives this encouraging assurance to His disciples, in Mark xi. 24, "What things soever ye desire, when

ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." And again, in John xiv. 13, He declares, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do." And see too how the prayer of Abraham's servant was answered, Gen. xxiv. 27; and Hannah's prayer, 1 Sam. i. 19; and Elijah's, 1 Kings xviii. 36—38; and the prayer of the Thief on the cross, Luke xxiii. 42, 43; and of the early Christians, Acts iv. 31.

But *how* does God answer prayer? Does He always answer it in a plain, marked way? Does He always answer it at once? Does He give the very thing we ask for? We shall see.

1. God's answers to our prayers are

seldom so plain, that we can at once say, "Here is *a direct answer* to my prayer." I dare say, we should like it better if it were oftener so. Like the Pharisees, we should be glad of "some sign from heaven." We think perhaps that if we could only have some plain, clear, proof that our petitions were granted, this would greatly warm and strengthen our faith. For instance, if God would answer by a voice from heaven, this would leave no doubt upon our minds. But no: this is not God's way of acting; so we must not look for it. Indeed, if this were to be the case, there would be nothing to try our faith.

2. God sometimes answers us, by *giving us something better* than we have

asked for. I will give you an instance of this. We find from 2 Cor. xii., that St. Paul suffered much from a certain affliction, which he calls, "a thorn in the flesh." What this affliction was we know not; but it was something which he regarded as a severe trial. He comes to the throne of grace, and entreats the Lord to remove it. Again and again he urges his request. And does God listen to his prayer? Undoubtedly He does. It is heard in heaven, and accepted. But it is not answered in the way that we should have expected, or in the way that he himself expected. The trial is not removed. But, instead of its removal, something else is given him—namely, power to support him under it. Here was the answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

It is not that our gracious Father ever mocks His children. When His son "asks for bread," He does not "give him a serpent." But he acts towards us as a wise and loving Parent; and when we ask for one thing which *we* think will make us happy, He perhaps sees fit to give us another, which *He* knows will make us much happier.

God's promise is that "if we ask anything *according to his will*, he heareth us." Now, a poor man may ask for riches; and God may see fit to refuse him, because He may see that poverty is better for him. Or, a sick man may ask for health: but it may be God's will to bless him, by keeping him on his bed of sickness. Or, a man may beg success in something that he is planning; when perhaps that very success would be his ruin.

What *we* think is best for us is not always really best ; and therefore it is sometimes a great kindness if God keeps it from us. The Heathens tell a story about a man, who desired that everything which he touched might become gold. And his wish was granted. But he soon found it was to his cost. For when he came to eat, his meat as he touched it turned into gold ; and so the poor man was starved. We may get something from this heathen tale ; for it shows us that we sometimes ask for that which may be very hurtful to us.

I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace,
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.

I hoped that in some favoured hour
At once He'd answer my request,
And by His love's constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart ;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

" Lord, why is this ?" I trembling cried.
" Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death ?"
" 'Tis in this way," the Lord replied,
" I answer prayer for grace and faith."

" These inward trials I employ,
From self and pride to set thee free,
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou mayst seek thy all in Me."

Be assured then, God will do *what is best* ; though he may not do exactly

what *we wish*. It is indeed a great mercy that our God judges for us. It is well that He either gives, or keeps back, just as He sees will best promote our welfare.

3. A third way in which God often deals with His praying people is this—*He delays His answer* for some wise reason. God's promises to give are very plain; but He never promises that our requests shall be granted *immediately*. He is the best judge as to *when* He should give. And sometimes, to try our faith, He makes us wait. The water may be down at the very bottom of the well; but if we stretch out the hand of faith, we shall at length draw up the pitcher full to overflowing.

Look out in your Bible Matthew xv. 21—28. There you will find a beautiful instance of what I have been saying. A poor woman comes to Jesus with a humble prayer. At first He answers her not a word. Again and again she prays, and gets no gracious answer. Still her faith is strong. She cries, she follows Him, she kneels before Him. And then at length, in His own good time, Jesus gives her an answer full of mercy, “O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” The parable also of the poor widow, in Luke xviii., is intended to show us the same thing.

Yes, God sometimes delays; but it is in mercy that He does so. If some silly children were to go into a garden, and see the trees covered with fruit,

they would perhaps wish to pick it, though it might be quite green. And are not we sometimes like these foolish children? We are impatient for God's mercies, when perhaps they are not ready for us. But, if we waited, they would come to us in the Lord's good time, and they would then have far more sweetness.

Never was any faithful prayer lost. No merchant trades with such certainty as the praying believer. Some prayers indeed have a longer voyage than others; but then they often come with the richer lading at last.

Be not discouraged then. "Continue in prayer." Do not be silenced by one *seeming* refusal. Your God hears you.

Though He tarry, wait.
The promise may be long delayed,
But cannot come too late.

4. It does however sometimes happen, that God is pleased *to give immediately*, and also *to give the very thing* we ask for. It was so with Hannah. She begged that a child might be given to her; and that very wish was instantly granted. 1 Samuel i. So it was with David; "In the day when I cried Thou answeredst me." Psalm cxxxviii. 3. So it was with Daniel. While he was actually speaking and praying, he tells us, the Lord granted his request. Daniel ix. 20—23.

And so it may be with us. If we had more faith, and expected more from God, we should certainly have

more. And perhaps too our wants would be supplied more speedily.

And now, my dear Christian Brother, what can *you* say from your own experience? Have you not sometimes found, that although you have gone to God longing for some blessing, your petitions have seemed to be in vain? The thing desired has not been granted you. Ah, who is to blame? It may be, that a doubting, wavering, unbelieving heart was the cause. You asked, and received not, because you asked amiss.

But on the other hand, have there not been occasions, when you found that the thing which you desired has been granted? Can you not say, "The Lord did answer my prayer?" You

earnestly begged for certain blessings ; and they came to you. You sought for grace ; and it was granted to you. You asked for the Holy Spirit ; and He was given, to teach, and guide, and comfort you.

And can you not remember the time, when you prayed earnestly for something, which you *then* thought would be for your happiness ? But God, in mercy, refused you. And you have since clearly seen that *this very thing*, if you had obtained it, would have been most hurtful to you.

Now, what does this prove ? Why, it proves to us, better than a thousand arguments that our God does answer His children *most wisely and mercifully*. The next time then that you kneel down in prayer, think to yourself, The

God I am praying to can *hear* me.
More than this, He can *answer* me.
And yet more, He is able to give
“*abundantly above all that we can ask
or think.*”

CHAPTER VII.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF PRAYER.

THE most usual kind of prayer that we offer is

1. DIRECT SUPPLICATION. We kneel down and beseech God to give us Pardon, Grace, Strength, Guidance, for our souls; or else some blessing for our bodies. Here is a direct petition. We ask God for something. And who is there that knows himself, and does not feel that he has a thousand wants, which God alone can supply? And what a mercy, that we are permitted to

go and make these known to our heavenly Father.

2. CONFESSION is also a very important part of Prayer. In all our public prayers, and in all our private prayers, we should make a full acknowledgment of our sins to God. When I was trying to explain the nature of Prayer generally in the first chapter, I did so by bringing before you some cases of *prayer to man* ; and this served to shew what *prayer to God* is. Let me do the same with regard to Confession.

We will take a common case. Supposing a boy starts on some winter's morning to go to school. There has been a great deal of rain in the night, and the road he has been in the habit of taking is very wet and dirty. His

father therefore bids him take another road, which is considerably longer, but much drier. The boy sets out; but, finding himself late, he is tempted to go by the forbidden road. Being usually a good boy, he at first hesitates, remembering his father's order. Then he thinks of the punishment he shall get, if he is too late at school. At this moment a bigger boy comes running by; and having asked him the reason why he is stopping, he persuades him to break his father's command, and choose the nearest road. Away they go with all speed, and arrive just before the school opens. The lessons are done much as usual; and at the customary hour the school breaks up. The little boy does not feel comfortable, all the time he is in school. And

even when he is playing with his school-fellows, the thought will come across him, that he has been guilty of disobedience. When he gets home too, he feels anything but happy. There is a weight upon his mind, a load which he longs to get rid of. The poor boy, for the next day or two, has many a sad hour; but he keeps it all to himself, and tries to be cheerful. At last he can bear it no longer. He determines to go to his father, and tell him how wrong he has been, and how much this act of disobedience troubles him. You see he had disobeyed his kind father. He had done wrong. And he could not feel easy, till he had owned it.

Now, can you not fancy, what a relief it would be to the boy to *confess* his

fault; and what a comfort he would feel in unburdening his mind? Was he not right in doing so? And was not his father much better pleased with him, than if he had gone on concealing it?

Thus, you see, even confessing our fault to an earthly parent, when we have disobeyed him, is right, and it gives relief to the conscience. Learn from it then an important lesson. The only way by which a sinner can find relief is by confessing his sin to God; by unburdening his heart to his Heavenly Father, and entreating His forgiveness for Christ's sake.

It will be worth while to get your Bible, and turn to Psalm xxxii. There we see the workings of David's heart. He had sinned against God, by taking

Uriah's wife to be his wife. After he had done so he felt his sin deeply. It made him very unhappy. His conscience got no peace. For a while he kept his grief to himself. But was he happy? Read the 3rd verse; "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." During all this time there was a struggle going on; but the whispers of his conscience were stifled. At length, like the Prodigal, he could bear his misery no longer. He goes to his Father, and makes a full confession. He speaks of this in the 5th verse, "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will

confess my sin unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

Oh how David's soul was relieved, when the truth was all out; when he had confessed his sin; and had received a gracious pardon from his God. No wonder that he could afterwards say from his own happy experience, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven!"

As sinners, we have constant need to confess our guilt to God. And if we are in the daily habit of looking into our hearts, we shall daily find some new sin to acknowledge.

It is not enough to confess *in a general way*, that we have sinned. We must *go into particulars*, and take each sin separately, and carry it to the foot

of the cross to have it pardoned, and rooted out.

Watch over your own heart. Be very jealous lest any sin should remain there undisturbed. There is such a thing as getting familiar with sin. At first it gives us trouble; but if it is allowed to remain in the heart, by degrees the conscience becomes seared, and no longer feels uneasy. Just as we soon get accustomed to the loud ticks of a clock, when it is only a few yards from us. It startles us at first; but we soon get used to it. Find out, if you can, every sin that enters your heart, and bring it *at once* to your heavenly Father, confessing its greatness, and entreating His forgiveness. Do this, I say, *at once*, before your

conscience gets accustomed to its presence.

Some Christians, whose minds have been sorely burdened and harassed by past sin, have found much relief in opening their grief to some *Brother-Christian*, or to *their Minister*. This is acting on St. James's advice: for he says, "Confess your faults *one to another*."

When you are sick, you go to a Physician, and tell him of your aches and pains; and you describe to him the symptoms which distress you. You do not believe that he has any power of his own to heal you; but you go to him, because you know that he will give you his best advice, and will use the remedies which he believes to be best for you.

So you may go to your Minister; not believing that he possesses any pardoning power in himself; but because you feel sure that he is your appointed counsellor, and that he will point out to you those heavenly remedies, which are sure to give you relief. He will probe your conscience. He will stir you up to increased prayer. He will direct you to the cross—the great gospel remedy for a broken and contrite heart. Remember, it is only the blood of Christ can cleanse your sin-stained soul: “We have redemption *through His blood*, even the forgiveness of sins.”

Go, fellow-sinner, to that open Fountain. Let your eye be turned towards that bleeding Lamb, “which

taketh away sin ;" and God is pledged for Christ's sake to pardon you.

3. INTERCESSION is another branch of prayer. Praying for others is a blessed and happy Christian duty. St. James expressly charges us to "pray for one another."

What a mercy it is that God permits us to intercede for our brethren—to plead for those who are dear to us—and to pray even for those who are unworthy to pray for themselves !

It is written, that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." And how many instances have we in scripture of this kind of prayer obtaining much from God. Abraham's intercession for Sodom was favourably received, Gen. xviii. Moses was heard,

when he prayed for the people, Num. xi. 2, and xiv. 19, 20. Elijah's prayer for Israel was answered, 1 Kings xviii. 36, 37. St. Peter was delivered from prison in answer to the prayers of his brethren, Acts xii.

The following anecdote is mentioned in a book on prayer.* A weather-beaten sailor, on his homeward passage, encountered a dreadful tempest. His mother, who expected his return, was waiting with deep anxiety to see her son. During the raging of the storm she trembled, as she sat in her cottage, for her beloved child's safety. And with strong faith in God, she earnestly prayed for his preservation.

When night came, she and her husband retired—but not to rest. They

* By the Rev. P. B. Power.

were far too anxious to sleep. As the morning dawned, the winds were hushed, and all was calm. Presently the little gate in front of their dwelling turned on its hinges, the door opened, and their son, their beloved son, for whose life they had trembled, stood before them. The vessel had been driven into one of the many harbours on the coast, and was safe. "Mother," said he, as his tears ran down his rugged face, "I knew that you'd pray me home!"

It seems that in the midst of his danger he had thought within himself, "My mother prays for me—Christians' prayers are answered, and I may be saved." This gave him strength and courage. And truly her petition was heard and granted.

If this should meet the eye of any mother, I would say, Go thou, and do likewise. Pray for thy child. Pray especially for his soul. There is danger of his being wrecked in the storm of life. Thy prayers may save him.

If any one has wronged you, kneel down and pray for him : this will make you love your enemies. If one of your friends or neighbours is very ignorant or blind as to spiritual things, pray for him : this may be the means of God's enlightening grace coming into his soul. Pray too, for your minister : he needs your prayers ; and thus you may bring down blessings upon him and his work. Pray for your parish, and your neighbourhood. Pray for the heathen, that God would turn their darkness into light.

But besides its being our duty and our comfort to pray for one another, it is also very good for our own souls. It has been said that "one great means to get a large heart in prayer is to encourage tender and affectionate desires to help others in prayer." When you sometimes feel that your heart is shut up, and that you are in no frame to pray for yourself, try and pray for some brother and sister, in whom you are interested. This will often bring a blessing on your own soul, as well as a blessing on them. The heart, as it goes out for them, is warmed and blest itself.

4. PRAISE must also be mentioned. This is a very important and delight-

ful part of our devotions. Praise, or Thanksgiving, should always be mixed with our Prayers. The apostle says, "In everything by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God." Prayer is asking God to give something; Praise is thanking Him for what He *has* given.

And have we not much reason to be thankful to God for what He has done? Has He not often heard our prayers in the hour of our distress? Has He not turned our sorrow into joy? Has He not bestowed upon us far more than we deserve? Has He not given us a Saviour? Has He not opened heaven to receive us? Oh then we have reason enough to praise Him! Shall

the very heavens and the earth praise Him; and shall not we, who owe Him so much? Praise is His delight. "Whoso offereth me praise, he glorifieth me."

But our hearts are sluggish and dull; and therefore we often find it irksome to thank God. How very little praise most people mix with their prayers! And yet, if our hearts were right, they would be bursting with gratitude. They would be so full, that they would be continually pouring forth streams of praise.

A clergyman once went into an hospital; and there he saw a poor man lying upon one of the beds. He was evidently in the last stage of disease, and was suffering much pain of body. "My friend," said the clergyman, "do you

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want anything?" "No," he replied, "I have everything here that I require. All that I want is a more thankful heart, to praise the Lord for His great goodness to me."

Go, like that poor sufferer, and ask God to give you *a more thankful heart*. Try to see mercy in all His dealings. Though you may be poor, thank Him for all that He gives, and all that He in mercy keeps from you. Thank Him for the precious gift of His own dear Son. A thankful heart is a contented, happy, rejoicing heart. And surely, if any man has reason to praise the Lord, it is the pardoned, the accepted, the saved man. "It becometh well the just to be thankful."

Praise will be the Christian's employment in Heaven. Then let us

begin our sweet heavenly occupation now. Let us try to praise God in our poor, feeble, imperfect way now. Ah, we can do it but very poorly. Our hearts are loaded with corruption. Sin is like a heavy chain dragging us down. If we do, now and then lift up our hearts in praise, it is but for a little while that they are in tune. But it will not always be so. We shall be without sin in heaven. We shall be full of love. Our hearts will glow throughout eternity with a feeling of gratitude for redeeming mercy. Then we shall see what was the full depth of our sinfulness, and of God's mercy. And then we shall know all the length, and breadth, and depth, and height, of the love of Christ in giving His life for us. Then will a new song be put in

are a Father, or a Mother. If you would live like a Christian then, you have a further duty. It is to *pray to God with your family*. This is a delightful Christian duty.

In former days, when the world was very wicked, and there were but a few of God's people upon the earth, we are told there was a man who came to this pious determination ; " As for *me and my house*, we will serve the Lord." This man was Joshua. See Joshua xxiv. 15.

And when we look around us *now*, what do we see ? Why, we see a great many who do not fear God, many who are living without God in the world. Well then, what is to be done ? Shall we say, " I will do as others do ; I have no wish to be better than my neighbours ?" No, this would be very foolish

and very wicked. We ought rather to say, "Whatever others may feel, I desire to honour God, and to serve Him faithfully." "As for *me and my house*, we will serve the Lord."

Now, one of the plainest marks of a godly household is the use of *Family Prayer*. If you wish well to your children, and those under your roof, you will pray *for* them. And you will do more; you will pray *with* them.

Family prayer *is your duty*. No one can be a Christian Parent, or a Christian Master, who neglects it. What would you think of a Father or a Mother, who refused to clothe and feed their children? You would certainly call them very cruel. But remember, your children have souls as well as bodies; and I am sure, if you feel a

concern for your own soul, you will feel concerned for theirs also. Yes, their souls are very precious !

Now, if you really want your children to turn out well, and to become the servants of Christ, you cannot begin too early to train them up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Let them see that *you* honour God yourselves. Gather them around you morning and evening, or at all events once a day, and then commend them to His fatherly care. Ask for a blessing, not on yourselves only, but on your family also. Bring before God, not merely your own private wants, but those of your household. This was Abraham's practice ; and God said of him, " I know him, that he will command his children, and his household

after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord."

A good man used to say, "A family without prayer is like a house without a roof, exposed to all the injuries of the weather, and to every storm that blows."

Oh, what a happy sight is a really *Christian* Household! There may be great poverty there; but still there is contentment. There may be sickness and trials there; but yet there is peace. The hand of death may be there; but there is cheerful submission. Your dwelling, my dear Friend, may be poor, and your furniture scanty; but if Christ is there, all will be well. If the voice of prayer and praise is heard in it, then God's blessing will be felt. His special presence is promised to you; for your Saviour says, "*Where two or three are*

gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Let me now say a few words, as to the way in which Family Prayer should be conducted.

It should be conducted in a serious and solemn manner. The Head of the family should begin by reading a portion of God's word; and if he is able to give a very short and simple explanation of it, so much the better. He should choose such parts, as are most likely to be interesting and instructive. Then all should kneel down, and he should offer up a simple, earnest prayer, finishing with the Lord's Prayer, in which all should join.

Family Worship must not however take the place of Private Prayer. Each

one of us has *his own sins* to confess, *his own wants* to make known, and *his own mercies* to acknowledge. And these he will best express for himself, when he is alone with God.

And now, my dear Reader, what think you of what has been said? Whilst your eye has been running over this chapter, it may be, your thoughts have been at work. And shall I guess what has been passing in your mind? Perhaps you have felt, that there is much truth in what has been said; but you have been thinking of all the *difficulties* there are in the way. I know there are difficulties; but ask God, and He can remove them all.

For instance, if you are a *Master*, perhaps you will say, "It is difficult to

get my servants together at a fixed time; they have all their occupations." I ask you to *try* it; and I promise that you will soon find the blessing of it.

If you *have a young family*, you may think that your children would be troublesome. Again I ask you to *try* it, and I am sure that it will prove to be the very best means to make them orderly.

If you are a *Labouring man*, you may feel, that when you come home at night after a hard day's work, you will be tired, and will be glad enough to go to bed. But if a few minutes were spent in prayer to God with your wife and your little ones, it would give the greatest refreshment to your soul. And thus you would go to rest happy, feeling that you have commended them all to

Him, who is able to watch over them, and keep them safely. Yes, *try* to get over the difficulties which lie in the way. Ask God to remove them ; and I feel sure they will all vanish, one by one.

Is there any truth in these remarks ? Then give them a serious thought. If your conscience tells you, that you have been wrong in neglecting Family Prayer, do wrong no longer. Do not say, "I will *consider* about it." This is Satan's way of tempting us. If he can only get us to *put off* a duty, his object is gained. Act at once, as David seems to have done, "I made haste and *de-layed not* to keep Thy commandments."

Begin this very day. Say to yourself, "I know that I am not sufficient

of myself to do anything rightly ; but I know that God will help me. I will do what I believe to be His will, and look to Him for His blessing."

CHAPTER IX.

PUBLIC PRAYER.

THE meeting together of God's people for *Public Prayer* seems to have been always observed. We can certainly trace it back as far as the time of the Israelites, above three thousand years ago. By the command of God, they used to meet together in a Building set apart for His worship. This Building was called the Tabernacle. It was a kind of moveable Tent, just suited to the wants of the Israelites, during their

journeyings from place to place in the wilderness. Here it was the delight of every pious Jew to meet his fellow-worshippers, and to draw near with them to the throne of grace. David, in his Psalms, often speaks of the great joy and comfort he felt in going up to the House of the Lord. He exclaims, in Psalm lxxxiv. "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts ! My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord ; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

Soon after the days of David, the Temple was built at Jerusalem. This was a much more substantial building. It was something like one of our great Cathedrals, only much larger, and more magnificent. In this temple all the scattered Jews used to meet together,

at certain times in the year, to offer up prayers and sacrifices.

When our Lord came upon earth, the Temple was still standing. And besides, there were several other smaller places of worship called Synagogues, both at Jerusalem and in the other Jewish towns. In the Gospels we often read of Jesus and his followers being present in these Houses of Prayer.

The very first thing that the Disciples did after their Lord's departure from them into heaven, was to meet for Public Prayer. Acts i. 12, 13, 14. Such too was their constant custom afterwards. And we find St. Paul exhorting the Hebrews "not to forsake the assembling of themselves together."

So you see, my Christian reader, that

Public Prayer is a scriptural duty. And can you not say that it has been to you a most delightful duty, a pleasure, a joy, a blessed privilege? Has not this again and again been the feeling of your heart, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord?" Have you not sometimes gone to God's house with a heavy heart; and come away lightened? Have you not gone there, mourning over the coldness and dullness of your feelings; and come home warmed and comforted? The dew of God's grace has fallen upon your soul, and refreshed it. The Sun of Righteousness has risen upon you, and every cloud has been dispersed.

There is certainly a *special* blessing promised to us in Public Worship. Where a few are gathered together in the

Saviour's name, there He pledges himself, as we have seen, to be in the midst of us. Matthew xviii. 20. Surely we can have but little faith, or we should look for a much larger flow of spiritual mercies in the House of God.

But let me say a few words about *the manner* in which we should conduct ourselves in our public devotions.

First. Let me remind you that we meet in the House of God *to pray*. Remember, it is written, "My house shall be called *a House of Prayer*." But can it be necessary that I should remind you of this? Alas! it is necessary. Some go only to hear the sermon. Some go to stare about them. And others, like so many machines, go through the mere form of worship.

I was lately reading of a person who had been travelling among the Calmucs (a Russian tribe). At the entrance of some of their huts he observed a kind of small windmill. He inquired for what purpose they were put there; and he was told that they were "praying machines." The owner of the hut causes certain prayers to be written by the priests; and they are then turned round by the wind, which saves him the trouble of repeating them himself.

A Christian wonders at such absurdities. But in the conduct of these poor ignorant Calmucs, may he not see something like a picture of his own conduct? The devotions of too many Christians are but little better. It seems to be quite enough with some

to make their appearance in God's house. They hold a Prayer-book in their hand; and this is to them what the praying machine is to the Calmuc. They seem almost to expect it to pray for them, and to bring down from heaven all the blessings they need, without any trouble or concern of their own. Before then you smile at the poor ignorant Calmuc's devotions, see that your own are what they ought to be. It is not enough to listen to the prayers or to read them ever so attentively in your Prayer-book. You should *pray the prayers*. You should make them your own. Be not a mere listener in God's house, but a worshipper.

Secondly. Be careful about your *posture*. I said something about this in the third chapter. But I wish to

say something more. Ours is not, I know, a mere bodily service, but a spiritual one. It is the service of the heart. But still, a lowly posture of the body is fit for those who are approaching God.

If you will take the trouble to look out the following passages, you will clearly see that *kneeling* was the posture observed by the people of God in Scripture times. Exodus iv. 31; xxxiv. 8. Psalm xcv. 6. 1 Kings viii. 54. Dan. vi. 10. Luke xxii. 41. Acts vii. 60; ix. 40; xx. 36; xxi. 5. *Standing* however seems to have been allowable. Mark xi. 25. Luke xviii. 11, 13.

But go into our churches, and what do you find? You see the greater part of the congregation, not kneeling, not even standing, but actually *sitting at*

their ease, during the solemn act of prayer! Alas, how wrong! How useless to call ourselves "miserable sinners," and yet to approach God in such a way as this! Surely our people will never worship God *inwardly*, as long as they thus despise Him *outwardly*.

My dear friend, have you been hitherto one of the sitting part of the congregation? Then I solemnly and affectionately warn you not to dishonour God any more. Though many around you sit, do you kneel, or at least stand. No matter, if you should act differently from the rest of those in your 'pew; you will be acting rightly. No matter, if some should jeer you; your conscience will tell you that you are right. And sometimes, you know, we must meet with reproaches for our

Master's sake. How happy it would make me, if I could watch you reading this book, and then follow you to church next Sunday, and see you *on your knees* before God! May He give you strength to do what is pleasing in His sight!

Thirdly. Join heartily in all the prayers. In some parts of the service only the voice of the minister ought to be heard. In these you should pray silently and secretly, but still you should pray *fervently*. But there are other parts, in which all should pray aloud. And what a life and warmth it gives to our services, when this is heartily done. Supposing that all, with one heart and voice, should pray, when they are required to pray; praise, when they are required to praise; and sing, when

they are required to sing; what would be the effect? What a change would then take place in our public worship! There would be no complaint then of the want of heart, and life, in our solemn services. *Then*, as St. Paul says, if there should come in "one that believeth not, or one unlearned," he would indeed be "convinced of all;" and, "falling down on his face, he would worship God, and would report that God was in us of a truth."

Yes, this would be delightful indeed. And how can it be brought about? Not by empty wishes. Not by sighs after a better state of things. A congregation is composed of different members. *You*, my reader, are one. Let *your* prayers, in the House of God, be henceforth more earnest. Let *your* voice of

prayer and praise be *heard* in the congregation.

Fourthly. Keep your heart fixed on God. Have you not sometimes felt quite ashamed, when the service is ended, to think how little you have prayed; and how sadly your mind has wandered away from God? Have you not found that the most worldly, and the most trifling, thoughts will creep in, if they are not forcibly shut out? This shows what corrupt and fallen creatures we are. The world follows us to the very House of God. It clings to us, even when we are before His throne. Watch against this. Strive against it. Pray against it.

Lastly. Avoid all light, vain, and worldly conversation both in going to God's house, and in returning from it.

If you go to church in a devout and prepared state of mind, you will find that this is the surest way to enjoy a peaceful and holy frame during the service. How often we have seen a person come in late and hurried. It is quite impossible that he can bring his mind to engage at once in the solemn work of prayer. Perhaps, for the last half-hour, he has been thinking of his dress, or has been engaged in some worldly matter; and thus he rushes into the presence of his God. No wonder if his heart is far away. No wonder if the world, instead of God, is in all his thoughts. It is very important then to try and get your heart right *beforehand*, by drawing near to God in your closet, and asking Him to be specially with you in His House.

And then, after the service, how is it usually with us? The congregation breaks up, and the doors open; and too many, as they walk home, begin almost immediately to talk about the most trifling matters. To hear them, one would little guess that they had been to the house of prayer. God is forgotten; heavenly things are put aside; and the good seed of His word choked. Beware of this; for Satan thus draws off multitudes of souls. "Keep thy heart with all diligence."

May there be more praying people in our congregations! May God put more life into our services! May our confessions be more heartfelt, our petitions more earnest, our praises more lively, and our hearing more childlike!

May we say of God's House " Surely the Lord is in this place. This is none other but the House of God, and this is the gate of Heaven !"

CHAPTER X.

A WORD OR TWO ABOUT WRITTEN PRAYERS
AND EXTEMPORARY PRAYERS.

It is a question with many persons, whether in Private Prayer it is best to use a Form, or to pray in our own words. Some feel that they need the help of a written form ; and if so, it is quite lawful for them to use it.

But no written prayer, and no one prayer learnt by heart, can express *all* our wants. You would not think well of the Beggar whom we spoke of in the first chapter, if you found that he had

got up his petition by heart, and then repeated the selfsame words at every door he knocked at. No, there would be a want of reality about his requests. You would say, they were not natural. And so, if we repeat the very same words in our prayers, day after day, there is apt to be a coldness and a deadness about them. Many things too will of course be left out. For every day we have fresh sins to confess, fresh mercies to be thankful for, and fresh wants to make known. Besides, a Christian often finds himself in such an emergency that a formal written prayer would be out of the question. He is suddenly assaulted by Satan ; or he meets with an unexpected affliction. All he can do in such a case is to dart up a few words to heaven, and call God

to his help. And blessed is the man who hath his quiver full of such arrows. Indeed those persons, whose souls are alive before God, will generally feel that no words of *another* can speak for them all that they wish to say.

I am inclined to think that what many require is something between the two. Their own wants are so many, and their own hearts are so full, that they cannot but speak; and yet they need some little help to keep their minds from wandering. For this purpose I would strongly recommend the daily use of some such Form as that which you will find at the end of this book.

There is another plan, that I would also strongly recommend—and that is *the turning of Scripture into prayer.*

Select, for instance, some suitable chapter, and take one verse in it each morning; kneel down, and use it as a kind of devout prayerful meditation before God.

What I have as yet said however only refers to *Private Prayer*. But in our *Public Worship* it is quite different. We meet in the house of God, not to speak of our individual cases, but of what concerns *us all*. We confess together our sins as a congregation. We pray together for common blessings. We lift up together the voice of praise for mercies, which call forth the thanks of all.

Now, we of the Church of England have got a Form of Prayer for our use; and happily this form of prayer is

sound, and scriptural, and suited to our wants. Let us inquire how we came by it.

Ever since the earliest times, the Christian Church has always had some Liturgy, or Form of Prayer. The Roman Catholics however introduced, first one error, and then another. At the glorious time of the Reformation, the praying people in England who felt obliged to separate from the Romish Church, saw that it was desirable to have a special form of words for their public services. So what did they do? Did they say, We will burn the wheat, because there is a great deal of chaff and dust mixed with it? Did they determine to have nothing to do with the prayers which their pious forefathers had used, because

here and there some grievous error had crept in? No, they acted more prudently. Thanks be to God, our English Reformers were wise and holy men. They examined the prayers carefully, and compared them with the Word of God. Every expression, which they saw to be contrary to God's truth, they struck out. Everything that was scriptural and sound they kept. This was the principle they acted upon. And thus we have in our beautiful Liturgy many prayers, which were written and offered up by holy men of old, who lived not long after the days of the apostles.

Soon after the Reformation began, in the reign of King Henry the Eighth, a sort of Prayer-book was published. This was much improved in the reign

of King Edward the Sixth. In the days of popery, the public prayers had been in Latin ; but now the people had the comfort of meeting together to offer up prayer in their own language. The Prayer-book has been slightly altered at different times ; but the last alteration was made in the year 1661, during the reign of Charles the Second. And this is the Form of Prayer, which we now make use of. It would be folly to speak of it as if it were faultless. It is not, like the Bible, the Word of God. It is the work of man, and therefore it cannot be perfect. Still, I believe, that no prayers have ever been offered up in public more pure, and more scriptural, than those which we possess. Even those who

have dissented from our Church have acknowledged this.

Oh, let us be thankful to God for this "form of sound words." Let us prize our Prayer-book, because it contains the words of truth and soberness. Let us prize it, because it has been handed down to us by those holy men, who, many of them, laid down their lives for the truth. Let us prize it, because it contains the very prayers which many who are now in heaven have used before us!

As to our *Private Prayers*, we will use either our own words, or we will borrow those which have been written by others—just according as our necessities require. But in our Public Assemblies we will thankfully offer up

those earnest, and scriptural, and suitable words, which have already so often expressed the wants of God's people, and have so often reached His ear. We will offer them up fervently and heartily, looking for a gracious answer.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LORD'S PRAYER EXPLAINED.

HAVE you not often said the Lord's Prayer without understanding it? You have repeated the *words*, and that was all. Your heart did not go with your lips. As I am afraid this is the case with many, I will now try to explain the Prayer to you.

Let us begin with the *name* of it. Why is it called the Lord's Prayer? It is because this was the prayer, that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself gave to

His disciples. He did not mean that this was to be the only prayer they were ever to use ; but He gave them this as a kind of pattern for their other prayers. Now whilst I am trying to instruct you, may God teach you by His Holy Spirit !

The Prayer begins thus—“ *Our Father which art in heaven.*” God is not on earth. We cannot see Him. But He is an Almighty Being, whose throne is in heaven. He looks upon us as His dear children, and allows us to call Him our Father. And though He is in heaven, remember there is not a word you say, or a thought in your heart, that is hidden from Him. When you pray then, think to whom it is you are speaking. It is to your Father in heaven.

"Hallowed be thy name." The first thing you pray for is this, that your heavenly Father's name may be *hallowed*, or counted holy. How many there are on all sides, who have no fear of God! His name is often on their lips, but they do not love Him. Now if you are a true Christian, this will grieve you. What you will most desire is, that your heavenly Father may be feared and honoured. So you are taught to pray, *"Hallowed be thy name."*

"Thy kingdom come." There are two kingdoms in the world; the kingdom of Satan, and the kingdom of Christ. There are many who belong to Satan's kingdom; and he tries to get all to belong to it. But Christ has told us, that Satan's kingdom shall one day be

destroyed; but His own kingdom shall stand for ever. The time will come, when all "the kingdoms of this world" will "become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ." Every good Christian longs for this; and therefore from his heart he prays, "Thy kingdom come."

"*Thy will be done.*" You know who those are, who are always doing God's will in heaven above. I mean the holy angels, and the saints of God. Their employment is loving and serving Him. And would not this be a happy world, if *we* did the same? Oh pray that it may be so. Truly it is our duty and our happiness cheerfully to give up our will to God. Now listen to the following anecdote. A story is told of a great Captain, who, after a

battle, was talking over the events of the day with his officers. He asked them who had done the best that day? Some spoke of one man who had fought very bravely, and some of another. "No," he said, "you are all mistaken. The best man in the field to-day was a soldier, who was just lifting up his arm to strike an enemy; but when he heard the trumpet sound a retreat, checked himself, and dropped his arm without striking the blow. That perfect and ready obedience to the will of his general is the noblest thing that has been done to-day." And such should be our perfect obedience to God: whatever is His will, we should do it.

You will observe that, in these three petitions which we have already ex-

amined, we ask nothing for *ourselves*; but we pray for our Father's honour, for our Father's kingdom, and that men may do our Father's will. We next come to our own wants.

“*Give us this day our daily bread.*” What are we to understand by the word “*bread*?” Surely, not a crumb of bread alone. We want clothes to cover us, and many other things. The word “*bread*” is put for all things needful. You will observe too, we are not taught here to ask for a great heap of riches, but for just enough and no more. . Again, we have a soul as well as a body; and that must be fed too. It needs “the bread of life” to nourish it. So that when we pray “Give us our daily bread,” it is as much as to say, “Give us what is really needful

for our bodies, and also for our souls."

"*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.*" Trespasses mean faults, or sins. I am sure, not a day passes without our falling into some sin or other. And therefore we have daily need of forgiveness. God has promised pardon to those, who come to Him in the name of His dear Son. But how can we hope to be forgiven, if we have an unforgiving temper ourselves? Our Lord says, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

"*Lead us not into temptation.*" That means, "keep us from temptation." You and I are daily tempted to do what is wrong. Satan is always trying

by some means to make us sin. He tempts some to swear, to lie, to break the sabbath. He tempts others to give way to anger, or to disobey their parents, or to forget God. He leads others to commit more secret and hidden sins. And does he not tempt *you*? Do not trust then to your own strength, for you are very weak. Fly to God, and ask for His mighty help. Be in good earnest when you say, "Lead us not into temptation," that is, "Keep us out of the way of temptation."

"*But deliver us from evil.*" There are ten thousand evils, to which both the body and the soul are liable. From these God alone has power to protect us. In this petition therefore we pray for His gracious deliverance.

"*For thine is the kingdom, the power,*

and the glory, for ever and ever." These words finish the prayer. Here you see our reason for praying to God. Because the "*kingdom*" is His; and He is the Lord and Maker of all the world. The "*power*" is His; so He can grant everything we ask for. And the "*glory*" of our deliverance is His, and shall be His for ever!

But there is still one little word in the beginning of this prayer, which we must not pass over. That word is "*our*." We are commanded to say "*our* Father," and not "*my* Father." This is to teach us that we are not to pray for ourselves alone, but for the whole family of God on earth. When we say, *our* Father, we should bear in mind that God has other children besides ourselves. Do we then love one

another, as Brothers and Sisters? Do we live, as brethren ought to live, in peace and concord? Do we help each other, and feel for each other, and desire each other's welfare? Oh, there is a blessed bond of brotherhood, which links us together, as children of the same Father, and travellers towards the same home! And shall we not love to pray for one another, when we are pleading before the throne of God?

CHAPTER XII.

HINDRANCES IN PRAYER.

Is there a Christian who knows the value of Prayer, and desires frequently and earnestly to engage in it, who does not also feel that he is oftentimes sore let and hindered in drawing near to God? I am sure that the most advanced believer has cause to mourn again and again that his visits to the Throne of Grace are so few and so unworthy. He knows that God hears prayer, and he has tasted at times great peace in telling out the secrets of his

heart to Him : but still there is often a clog which keeps him back. Or again, when he does kneel down and prays, there is a coldness and deadness which spoils his devotions.

How is this? From what quarter does the hindrance come? And what is it that makes the wheels of prayer drag so heavily?

I. Some of the Christian's Hindrances are *from without*.

Satan is the greatest hinderer of prayer. He uses every device to keep us away from the Throne of Grace ; for he knows that the more converse we hold with God the stronger and happier we are.

Have you not sometimes said to yourself, I will pray at a given hour;

and when that hour has come, some trifling circumstance has arisen to prevent you? Or, when you have knelt down, has not some worldly thought—yea even some wicked thought—come across you, and altogether disturbed your mind? This is Satan's doing. And if you are not on your guard, he will effectually draw away your heart from God.

Jesus knew this, and therefore cautioned His disciples to "*watch* and pray," lest they "should enter into temptation." And St. Paul knew it too when he said, "Be sober, and *watch* unto prayer." Remember, you have Satan ever near you, and never so near as when you are on your knees. Be prepared for him. Resist him, and he will flee from you. You cannot alto-

gether escape his assaults. He will be ever hovering around you, and plying you with his temptations. Our sin is, not in being *tempted*, but in *yielding to* the tempter. I have read that, in some countries such swarms of locusts are sometimes seen, that they almost darken the air as they fly, and devour every green thing where they settle. The inhabitants, therefore, when they perceive this army hovering over them, keep them from lighting by making fires in their fields. Now, although you cannot hinder roving thoughts from flying now and then over your head, surely you can prevent their settling. Use all your exertions to do so.

Then *the World* is another hinderer. The riches, the pleasures, and even the

necessary occupations of the world, are all apt to deaden our hearts, and act as leaden weights to our wings, when we would soar upwards towards God.

Perhaps you are eagerly seeking to *be rich*. Your mind is bent upon it. Your waking thoughts are towards the golden object you have in view. Your strength, your energies, your tastes are all turned that way. What is the consequence? God is thrust aside : heaven is lost sight of. You pray ; but it is to a God afar off. You ask for spiritual things ; but your desire is for worldly things. You pray coldly, fruitlessly, heartlessly. Ah, how worthless are such prayers ! They are uttered ; but they fail to reach the ear of God. The words go forth ; but

the heart and the life of prayer are wanting.

Or, it may be, you have a strong thirst for *pleasure*. You are whiling away precious hours and days merely to gratify yourself. You are living for present enjoyment. Your aim is to gather all the honey you can from this world's flowers whilst they are in bloom, forgetting that, as soon as you have tasted it, it will lose its sweetness.

I do not say that the pleasure you are so eager about is in itself unlawful. But the most innocent pleasures *become* unlawful, if we care too much for them, and let them take up the thoughts and time which should be given to God. And oh how sadly do they interfere with, and hinder, our prayers ! The mind is filled with other things, and

there is no room for God. Have you never felt, when you have yielded yourself to pleasure for a while, how hard it is to gather up your thoughts, and turn for a few minutes to the sober, spiritual work of prayer? No, your heart is elsewhere, and you cannot call it back.

Or again, perhaps your particular calling forces you to be much occupied with *worldly matters*. These take up your time from morning till night. How difficult, when such is the case, to be "active in business," and yet at the same time "*fervent in spirit*, serving the Lord." And is this possible? Yes, it is; for we need not fall into Martha's fault, and be "cumbered about much serving." The hard-working Labourer, the active Mechanic, the industrious

Servant, the busy Tradesman, the stirring Man of business, may all do their work right well, and yet not neglect the careful culture of their souls. God may be often in their thoughts; and they may give some portion of their time to Him.

But you, who are much occupied, must be on your guard. You have need indeed to be very watchful, or your souls will be sure to suffer. I would recommend you to get into the habit of putting up short secret petitions to God, whilst you are at your occupations. And I would also advise you to be very exact in setting apart certain fixed hours for the special work of prayer. The more you are occupied, the more need you have to live by rule.

II. Besides these Hindrances from *without*, there are many also from *within*. I will mention three.

Sin is one of them. If there is any allowed and cherished sin, that is quite enough to dry up the stream of prayer within you. It may be an open sin, or it may be a secret one—no matter which—so long as it is encouraged, you cannot pray aright, and God's ear will not listen to you. "If I regard iniquity in my heart (says David) the Lord will not hear me." It has been said that if only one artery in the body were open, it would let out the life-blood just as surely as if every vein in the body had given way. And so one single sin, which is loved and fostered in the heart, is enough to rob the soul of all its life.

Look well then, and see that your

conscience is clear, and that you can go to God with an honest and true heart, and not be ashamed to lay all open before Him. Unless you can do so, you will never feel prayer to be an enjoyment, or God's presence to be that in which your soul delights.

Unbelief is another thing which hinders us. Of course a professed unbeliever will never pray at all; for "he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." But I am rather speaking here of that spirit of unbelief which is ever creeping into the hearts of God's people, tempting them to feel that the Lord is far off, that their prayers will not be heard, and that it is useless to seek Him. Who has not felt something of

this? We have need indeed to be ever acknowledging our weakness on this point, and to be constantly imploring God to give us that faith, which is not in us naturally, but which comes from Him. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

A spirit of Carelessness is also a great hindrance to prayer. When a Christian grows careless, prayer is sure to be neglected, or to be offered up feebly and unwillingly. For instance, if a person grows slack about his Bible-reading, or about his attendance in the House of God, or about any other Christian duty, then his private devotions will suffer; they will become irksome and unmeaning. We cannot be fervent in religion, and yet cold and formal in

prayer. Neither can we be careless about religion generally, and yet fervent in prayer.

If then your heart is not earnestly and steadily fixed on the things of God, do not wonder that the throne of grace has no charms for you. Let your soul be neglected, and the effect will instantly be felt when you attempt to draw near to God.

Thus you see that Prayer has its Hindrances. The young Christian does not at first see them. He fancies that all is easy—that he has but to resolve on praying, and then all difficulty is at an end. Yes, and it is easy enough to repeat the words—to make certain sounds with our lips—but I have shewn you that this is not Prayer. Let any

one however begin to pray in earnest—to pray from his heart—to pray perseveringly—to pray as one who is speaking to God Himself—and he will soon find how much he is hindered by Satan and the world without, and by his own evil heart within. But, thank God, these difficulties *may* be mastered; for He who bids us pray can give us all the help we need.

CHAPTER XIII.

ENCOURAGEMENT IN PRAYER.

THERE is abundant encouragement for the humble, earnest, praying Christian. The more he prays, the more he will love to pray. For as the wheel warms with its own movement, so the heart gains fervour the more it employs itself in the blessed work of prayer. Try this, dear Reader, and you will find that there is a sweetness in prayer, which those only know who are often in God's presence.

I know that to many prayer is_a

most uninteresting employment. And so it will always be, if it is undertaken in a formal manner; it will be an effort, every time we engage in it. But if we pray from our hearts—if we pay frequent visits to the mercy-seat—if we get into the way of pouring all our wants, our trials, and our joys into the ear of our heavenly Father—then prayer will indeed become our happiest and most blessed work.

How willing too is the Lord to give—so willing, that we need not be afraid to press Him. He tells us that we have but to “ask, and it shall be given us.” Why then do we not believe Him, and trust Him more? It is said in one of our Collects, that God is “more ready to hear than we to pray,” and that He “is wont to give more than

either we desire or deserve." And truly it is so. Look at the Canaanitish woman mentioned in Matt. xv. See how earnestly she pleads her cause. She seems to say, "Lord, thou hast much to give; wilt thou not bestow it? I am but a dog; but the dogs must be fed, as well as the children." Look at Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." If it was thus with us we should soon be able to tell of mercies received, and of prayers answered. Instead of our coming, as we so often do, from the wells of God's ordinances with our pitchers empty, they would be running over with blessings—our water would be turned into wine—our weakness into strength.

We can never weary God with our petitions. Let this embolden us to be

consulting God *on all occasions*, and bringing *our every-day wants* before Him. It would be well if we were much more in His presence, and approached Him oftener as our Father and our Friend. Does not a parent love to see his little child coming to him for his advice, or sheltering itself under his protection, when it feels that danger is near? And is our heavenly Father less kind and gracious? Perhaps some trying event may arise, and you may not know how to act for the best. Think of Hezekiah, and go and spread out your case before God, just as he spread his letter before the Lord. Isaiah xxxvii. 14. Or, does it not sometimes happen that we may wish to please God, but we may not know what His actual will is? In such a case, let us draw near

to Him in the words of St. Paul, " Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?" Again, we may be called upon to suffer. Some heavy affliction may be hanging over us. Oh how light our trouble will become, if we go, like our meek and patient Master, and say that we are quite willing to bear all that may be laid upon us ; " Father, not my will, but thine be done !" Try and carry all your trials, and difficulties, and joys, and sorrows to God, " casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you." Let Him often hear from you about the wants of your soul.

There is another thing which should greatly encourage us in prayer. I mean *the Intercession of Christ* : He pleads for us in the courts above. The

Apostle tells us, in Rom. viii., that Christ is "at the right hand of God," and that He there "maketh intercession for us." And in the Epistle to the Hebrews he shews, that as the Jewish High Priest of old used to enter into the holiest part of the Temple, and used there to offer up his prayers for the Israelites, so Jesus our great High Priest has entered heaven itself, and there He appears "in the presence of God *for us.*"

It must have been a great comfort to the devout Israelite to know that the High Priest was pleading for him before the mercy-seat of God. When he felt his sinfulness, he must have been very thankful to have one who could speak for him, and bring his case before the Lord. But the Christian

has still more reason to be thankful ; for there is One in heaven, very dear to his heavenly Father, and near His very throne, who “ ever liveth to make intercession ” for him.

But Jesus does not pray for all. If we are living in sin, or leading careless, thoughtless lives, the Saviour pleads not for us. No prayers go up in our behalf. No intercession is made in our favour. We are left to struggle on alone in our sinful course. It is true, the Saviour yearns over us with unceasing love, even in the midst of all our wanderings. He longs to gather us in His arms, and press us to His bosom. It is true, He knocks again and again at the door of our hearts, and works in us by the power of His Holy Spirit. If we are living to the world, and

bearing no fruit, He asks His heavenly Father to lengthen out His sparing mercy towards us. But still we have no grounds for believing that the Saviour intercedes for us *as He does for His faithful people*. Nay, He positively declares that in such a case we have no part whatever with Him, "I pray not (He says) for *the world*, but for them which thou hast given me."

But He *does* plead for us, if we put ourselves in His hands. Yes, if we are His servants, we have the unspeakable benefit of His prayers in our behalf. He is constantly interceding for us; and every blessing which we have comes to us through His application.

Look at John xvii. There we see our loving Redeemer engaged in prayer.

He scarcely offers up a word for Himself; but He pleads for His beloved people—not merely for those who were then around Him, but for others also, even for us, if we are His disciples.

Take comfort from this, dear Christian Brother or Sister. Your Saviour bears you on His heart. He knows all your wants, and mentions them to His heavenly Father. His word, His blood, His sacrifice, His righteousness—all as it were with one voice are speaking for you. Are you at times scarcely able to string two words together in prayer? Are there occasions when your tongue is tied, and your heart within you cold and lifeless? Do you not rise from your knees sometimes with the consciousness that your devotions have been but a poor miser-

able offering? At such seasons, how comforting to know that the heart of Jesus is never cold, and that His prayers for you have found acceptance, whilst yours have been like an arrow shot from a broken bow.

Again, are there not moments when strong temptation assails you—when your heart is ready to fail—when your strength is but weakness, and your faith is sadly mixed with unbelief? Then let this thought cheer you; My Saviour is interceding for me in the courts above.

Or let the dark hour of affliction come. Let misfortune reach you. Let friends be taken from you. Let the hand of God be heavy upon you, and your poor aching heart tries to submit to its Father's will. Oh, is it

nothing to fall back upon this precious truth of which we have been speaking? Is it nothing to know that the Saviour is mindful of your grief—and that while you are patiently bearing the yoke, He is praying for you that your faith fail not, that the trial may prove a blessing to you, and that you may come out of the furnace like “gold tried in the fire?”

Yes, Christian Believer, think often of the intercession of Christ. Think of Him standing at God's right hand, never ignorant of your wants, and never weary of advocating your cause before the heavenly throne.

But the Holy Spirit is also spoken of in Scripture as our Intercessor. In Rom. viii. we find St. Paul declar-

ing that "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what to pray for as we ought, but *the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us.*"

Have we then *two* Intercessors? Is the intercession of Christ and of the Holy Spirit one and the same thing? Both are engaged for us. Both plead for us. And yet there is this marked difference between the two—the Son pleads for us *in heaven above*: the Holy Spirit pleads for us *within our very hearts*. The one prays *for us*: the other helps us to pray rightly *for our selves*.

Realize this then, whenever you kneel before God. The Spirit offers you His help, and you cannot pray aright without it. He it is, who can alone give you a praying frame. He

alone can make you feel your wants, teaching you what to ask, and how to ask it. He can give you faith to carry those wants to the Father of mercies. He can put life into your heavy thoughts and flagging words. And He can make you feel that there is an ear to hear you, and a hand to supply you. Prayer must be *His* work, or it will not be true prayer.

The next time you pray, ask for the Holy Spirit's help. Go not alone to the throne of grace; but entreat Him to go with you. Perhaps hitherto you have prayed in your own strength. In future remember that there is a gracious Helper who offers to be with you.

Thus helped, the Christian may well feel encouragement. Prayer is one of

his hardest duties, but it is also one of the sweetest. The breathings of his soul will at best be poor and feeble. But his Father's ears are ever open to receive his petitions—his Saviour speaks for him with loving earnestness—the Holy Spirit is ready to pour light and life into his weak and drowsy soul.

Cheer up then, my dear fellow-disciple. Prayer is your strength, and the means of obtaining blessings from above. Use it frequently; use it fervently; use it thankfully. It will put you in possession of spiritual treasures of which you have never yet partaken.

And wilt thou in dead silence lie,

When God stands waiting for thy prayer?

My soul, thou hast a Friend on high:

Arise, and try thy interest there.

180 ENCOURAGEMENT IN PRAYER.

**If pain afflict, or wrongs oppress ;
If cares distract, or fears dismay ;
If guilt deject, if sin distress ;
The remedy's before thee—pray.**

**Depend on Him ; thou canst not fail ;
Make all thy wants and wishes known :
Fear not, His merits must prevail ;
Ask what thou wilt ; it will be done.**

CHAPTER XIV.

THE POWER OF PRAYER.

WE believe that there is a hidden power in certain *medicines*—a power in *electricity*—a power in *steam*. And what is the consequence? Do we sit still, and speak of this power, without employing it? No, we are glad enough to use it to our own advantage.

Would that we were as wise as regards spiritual things! How wondrous is *the power of Prayer*; and yet how slow we are to employ it! What is there that Prayer cannot do? Look

into the Bible, and observe what wonders it has accomplished. And see how large—how unbounded—God's promises are concerning it. Our Lord says, "*All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*" Again, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask *what ye will*, and it shall be done unto you." And further He says, "*Ask, and it shall be given you.*"

It has been said, that "Prayer moves the hand that moves the universe." Even God Himself is influenced by our prayers. He cannot refuse a really earnest petitioner. No true believing prayer was ever unheeded. "It seems (says one) as if God had disclosed the fact that He cannot withstand the prayers of His people. Look at the

case of Moses upon the mount. God complained to Moses ; ‘ These people, whom I have brought out of Egypt with a high hand and outstretched arm, have made themselves a golden calf. They bow down and worship it, and forsake me, who divided the waters of the sea for them to pass over, who wrought miracles for their deliverance in the land of bondage. My wrath is waxed hot against them. Now, Moses, *let me alone*, that I may destroy them ; and I will make of thee a great nation. *Let me alone*. Do not ask me to spare them.’

“ But what did Moses do ? Why, he fell on his knees. ‘ O my Father, what will become of Thy great Name,’ he said. ‘ What will the heathen say, and they of Egypt ? They will say

that thou broughtest them out here into the wilderness to destroy them, and couldst not save them. That be far from thee, Lord.' Now, mark what God did. He seemed not to be able to withstand the prayer of His servant; and rebellious Israel was saved!"*

Or take the case of Elijah and the Israelites. At the cry of God's Prophet, the heaven became as brass over them, and the earth as iron under their feet. The pastures withered, and the whole land languished. For three long years this lasted, till famine had done its appointed work. And all this, at the voice of a single man "of like passions as ourselves." He prays again. And now, at his bidding as it were, the sky is overcast, the clouds

Prime's "Power of Prayer."

gather, and there descends a cheering deluge to gladden all hearts in Israel.

You remember that, on one occasion, the Amalekites fought against Israel. Moses sent out an army against them. But he himself went up on a neighbouring hill, and prayed earnestly for victory; and his prayer was heard. Prayer brought God to Israel's side. Prayer overcame the Amalekites. It has been truly said that "one Moses on the mount was better than thousands of fighting men in the valley."

Such is the power of prayer. It prevails with God. It draws down gifts from heaven. It fills the empty soul. It brings strength to the weak, true riches to the poor, grace to the feeble. It is a Bank of wealth, a

Mine of mercies, a Store of blessings.
It flies where the eagle never flew. It
travels farther, and moves faster, than
the Light. Well might Mary, Queen
of Scotland, say, "I fear John Knox's
prayers more than an army of ten
thousand men."

Prayer makes the darkened cloud withdraw ;
Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw ;
Gives exercise to faith and love ;
Brings every blessing from above.
Restraining prayer, we cease to fight :
Prayer keeps the Christian's armour bright.

Have you not often observed a great
deal of difference among Christians ?
I am not speaking of the difference
between Christ's people and the people
of the world. All will allow that *they*
are altogether unlike. But I ask, is

there not a vast difference even between Christian persons ?

Some never seem to get on. They are born again ; but they remain babes all their lives. They are inside the fold ; but there they lie down, and get no further. Year after year you see them in the same state. You hear from them the same complaints. You find in them the same feebleness. They are like corn growing in a dry and barren soil—like stunted plants—like buildings, whose foundations are laid, but the walls never rise beyond a certain height.

But there are other Christians, who are always making progress. They grow like the grass after rain. They increase like Israel in Egypt. They press on like Gideon ; and though

they may at times be "faint," they are "always pursuing." Every time you meet them, their hearts seem to be larger and their spiritual stature taller. They attempt great things, and do great things. And yet, all the while, they think themselves poor and unprofitable servants, and fancy they do nothing at all. When you are with such persons, you feel that, like Moses, they have just come out from the presence of God. And when you leave them, you feel warmed by their company, as if your soul had been near a fire.

What makes the difference? Where does the secret lie? If you could go into the private chamber of each, you would soon discover the cause. It is Prayer that makes all the difference. The growing, thriving, advancing Chris-

tian is sure to be one who is much with his God in private. He has learnt, and daily tastes, the blessedness of prayer.

Many look upon great holiness as a kind of special gift which only a few can pretend to aim at. They read of it in books. They find it in the Bible. And sometimes, but very rarely, they see instances of it in those they meet with. Now, I believe that *any* Christian may become eminently holy, if he is diligent and earnest in closet prayer. Try, my dear Reader, and you will soon discover that there is a power in prayer, which will lift your soul to heaven.*

Many a humble Christian man has

* See a Tract on Prayer by the Rev. J. C. Ryle.

prayed earnestly for his Parish, and God has heard his prayer, and poured down a blessing upon that Parish. Many a Mother has prayed for some rebellious Child. His wayward course has made her heart again and again to ache. But she has gone on praying; and God has at length granted her the request of her lips. And God can do for *you*, my dear friend, whatever you want. "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask *anything according to his will*, he heareth us." There is nothing too great for Him to give—nothing too difficult for Him to accomplish—nothing too abundant for Him to bestow. Oh pray more for yourself and others. Draw nearer and nearer to Him, who sits upon a throne

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of mercy, waiting to be gracious. "Draw near, parents in behalf of children, and children for your parents; husbands in behalf of wives, and wives for husbands; ministers for their flocks, and people for their ministers; loving friends for one another. Draw near, you who are wrestling with sin, you whose bursting hearts are longing for settled peace in Christ Jesus, you who pant for growth in holiness and grace. Draw near, whatever gnawing desires may be in your heart. Draw near with faith. A holy servant of God thus once declared his happy experience—"I never was deeply interested in any object,—I never prayed sincerely and earnestly for anything—but it came. At some time—no matter

how distant a day—somehow, or in some shape—probably the least I should have desired—it came.”*

Why may not this be our experience, yours and mine? Why not, when we are encouraged to pray, and answers are promised? Why not, when a Father hears, when a Saviour pleads, when the Spirit helps? Why not, when Jesus, who is the truth has said, “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them?”

And now, dear Reader, farewell. If any one sentence in this book has come home to your heart—if your conscience

* See a Tract on Prayer by the Rev. C. D. Marston.

has been stirred—if any desire has been awakened in you to pray more—oh look upon it as a call from God. He may have spoken to you by me. And if so, I trust He has not spoken in vain! I am sure of this—that by whatever means He is pleased to rouse you to the habit of real fervent prayer, an altogether new life will be yours, with new joys on earth, and new hopes of heaven.

“CALL UNTO ME AND I WILL ANSWER THEE, AND SHEW THEE GREAT AND MIGHTY THINGS, WHICH THOU KNOWEST NOT.”

SUBJECTS FOR PRAYER. .

SUNDAY MORNING.

CONFESSION.—Coldness and formality in prayer. Abuse of past Sabbaths.

PETITION.—For God's presence. Gift of the Spirit to ministers and congregations, especially our own. The awakening of the unconverted, and the building up of God's people. Against wandering thoughts.

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Love of the world

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PRAISE.—For the gift of a Saviour. Pardoning and restoring grace.

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CONFESSION.—Want of kindness and tenderness. Unworthiness. Self-indulgence.

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SATURDAY MORNING.

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PRAISE.—For our home. Family blessings. Kind friends.

SUBJECTS FOR PRAYER.

SUNDAY EVENING.

CONFESSION.—Wanderings of thought. Worldliness of heart
Unbelief. Unconcern.

PETITION.—For a blessing on the seed sown. More life and
earnestness.

PRAISE.—For Sabbath mercies. God's forbearance. A Sa-
viour revealed.

MONDAY EVENING.

CONFESSION.—Indwelling sin. Backwardness to confess Christ.

PETITION.—For a consistent walk. Communion with God.
More faith.

PRAISE.—For temporal mercies. God's love.

TUESDAY EVENING.

CONFESSION.—Our lost state by nature. Unwatchfulness.
Self-esteem.

PETITION.—For protection. Love for souls. The young.

PRAISE.—For our privileges. For God's loving chastisements.

SUBJECTS FOR PRAYER.

WEDNESDAY EVENING.

CONFESSION.—Readiness to take offence. Sinful desires.

PETITION.—That Christ would make Himself known to us.

A holy walk.

PRAISE.—For our reason. Deliverance from danger.

THURSDAY EVENING.

CONFESSION.—Duties neglected. Grieving the Spirit.

PETITION.—To live a life of faith. Power to resist the devil.

PRAISE.—For sparing mercy. For our promised inheritance.

FRIDAY EVENING.

CONFESSION.—Lost time and opportunities. Iniquity of our holy things.

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PRAISE.—For answered prayers. The promise of Christ's Second Coming.

SATURDAY EVENING.

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PRAISE.—For God's care. His patience and love.

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